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Preface

Abstract

This study examines the extent to which the Bible's teaching regarding feminine nature and role shaped the changes modernity imposed on American women's lives in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It focuses on Texas Baptists between 1880 and 1920—a biblically conservative group of lower- and middle-class southwesterners—and provides alternative data to the existing studies of northeastern and southern women.

[Chapter II](#) delineates the specific biblical teaching regarding women that was emphasized by Texas Baptists and the ways they utilized those passages to justify an expanded role for women while retaining a concept of male authority in both the family and the church. Baptist women enlarged the scope of their religious activities most significantly between 1880 and 1920 in the creation of a successful missions support organization, the development of which is described in [Chapter III](#). Although this all-female "union" enhanced women's administrative skills and gave them an avenue to power, it maintained an auxiliary position to the denomination as a whole and avoided theological and political issues. [Chapter IV](#) notes the same configuration of change in other religious activities of women: they expanded their sphere in worship, education, and benevolence but left ordination to the both the ministry and the diaconate as a male prerogative. The widest field of service and the best possibility of a religious vocation for women lay in their serving as missionaries. [Chapter V](#) moves from the explicitly religious realm to other aspects of Baptist women's lives and focuses on the way Christian goals were translated into character models, educational pursuits, marriage, motherhood, and the exercise of civic responsibility.

Between 1880 and 1920 Texas Baptist women used the Bible to justify their exercising greater freedom, but the patriarchal orientation of the church and the family was retained. Although this conservative reaction to change had some positive elements—it emphasized the interdependence of the sexes and the need for rearing children in a stable environment—it severely

limited the full equality of Baptist women. That attainment necessitated further reinterpretation of their ideology and a willingness to deal openly with issues of conflict and power.

Acknowledgements

Despite moments when one resolves to preface a work with a succinct "I did it all myself," a researcher and writer is invariably in other people's debt. For a historian, that debt begins with those of the past who recorded events, thoughts, or creative urges. It extends then to librarians, archivists, and collectors who preserved those records and artifacts. Although I am unable to thank the Texas Baptists who lived the slice of history portrayed in this dissertation, I can acknowledge the help I received from their denominational descendants; specifically, the late Jean Tolbert, research librarian at Moody Memorial Library, Baylor University, and Kent Keefe and Ellen Kuniyuki Brown, archivists of The Texas Collection, Baylor University.

For my skills as a historian, I express gratitude to my teachers: Thomas L. Haskell, Ira D. Gruber, Martin Wiener, the late Charles Garside, Jr., all of the Rice History Department; the late Walter Isle of the English Department; and David L. Minter, Professor Emeritus of English, Rice University. Thomas Haskell, my major professor, now Professor Emeritus of History, accepted me as an uncertain, fledgling scholar and his broad intellect and analytical acumen have enlarged and corrected my vision in the intervening years. He was joined on the dissertation committee by professors John Boles of the History Department and James Sellers of the Department of Religious Studies, both of whom gave me professional encouragement and read with a careful editorial eye. The same care and friendship was offered by typists Jane Butler and Kay Lake.

The confidence expressed by the Woodrow Wilson Foundation in awarding me a Fellowship for Women's Studies supported me beyond its financial remuneration, although that was not insignificant. The aid of the Rice University History Department in the form of scholarships and a teaching assistantship was also appreciated.

My family provided the context in which my lengthy task was possible. During its progress my sons, Rex and Jeff, became college graduates themselves; but it was my daughter, Dale, who uttered the final word, "Of course you'll finish." Finally, inestimable thanks go to William Martin, who served as an unofficial fourth member of the dissertation committee--and as much more.

Abbreviations

BGCT	Baptist General Convention of Texas
BS	Baptist Standard
BWMW	Baptist Women Mission Workers
SBC	Southern Baptist Convention
TBH	Texas Baptist and Herald
WMU	Woman's Missionary Union

A Note On Names

Even during as limited a span as the scope of this study—1880 to 1920—common usage of women's names changed. In the late nineteenth century Texas women often shortened their given name and maiden name to initials; for instance, Fannie Breedlove Davis, a prominent Texas Baptist woman of the period, signed her letters and articles "F. B. Davis." This practice makes it difficult to assign sex to lists of names, such as the participants in a conference or meeting. Before women were expressly forbidden to serve as

messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention in 1885, Myra E. Graves of Texas signed in simply as "M. E. Graves" without incident.

After 1900, propriety increasingly demanded that a woman drop her own names and wear her husband's, preceded by "Mrs." Lou Beckley Williams, Fannie Davis's successor as president of Texas Baptist Women Mission Workers, was always referred to as "Mrs. W. L. Williams." Mary Hill Davis, who became president after Mrs. Williams, was formally called "Mrs. F. S. Davis," but she was such a strong figure that she was also frequently designated by her own names.

I have primarily sought to identify women by their given name and family name, but when using a shortened form, I maintained their usage of "Mrs." and "Miss." Only when a woman's given name was not known have I designated her exclusively by her husband's name.

Introduction and Chapter Topics

To say that Baptists believe the Bible is a truism. But to say that in the late twentieth century the largest and most vigorous Protestant body in the United States still affirmed that the "Bible is word-for-word God's message without scientific or historical error" [\[footnote\]](#) raised significant social and intellectual issues. This position, of course, was not limited to Baptists. In a 1977-78 Gallup opinion index, 83 percent of the general population—not just religious conservatives—stated that they believed the Bible to be the inspired word of God, [\[footnote\]](#) and six in ten affirmed that their religious beliefs were "very important" in their lives. [\[footnote\]](#) The respect and admiration accorded Billy Graham in poll after poll, the steady growth of evangelical religion in all parts of the nation in the 1970s, the election of Jimmy Carter in 1976 on the barest of past records save his personal faith and integrity, and the evangelical caucus that emerged in the political campaign of 1980 testified that the old-time religion was still "good enough" for many Americans. These facts suggest that despite the disdain in which intellectuals had held biblical inerrancy for a century, the Scriptures, interpreted literally, were still authoritative for a large segment of the nation.

Jim Asker, "Baptists Hear Graham," *The Houston Post*, June 14, 1979, p. 38. Quoting Reverend Adrian Rogers, newly-elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The Gallup Opinion Index, Religion in America: 1977-78 (Princeton, N. J.: The American Institute of Public Opinion, 1978), p. 44.

Ibid., p. 17.

Historians have often acknowledged a conservative religious tradition to be characteristic of the South. C. Vann Woodward stated:

"Neither learning nor literature of the secular sort could compare with religion in power and influence over the mind and spirit of the South. The exuberant religiosity of the Southern people, the conservative orthodoxy of the dominant sects, and the overwhelming Protestantism of all but a few parts of the region were forces that persisted powerfully in the twentieth century. [\[footnote\]](#)"

C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), p. 448.

And, a later scholar, Eugene Genovese asserted that a simple Christian faith, albeit one combined with African traditions, was an asset to American blacks, providing them with joy and community in the midst of an otherwise abusive system.[\[footnote\]](#) Generally speaking, however, conservative Christianity as an ideology was discounted in scholarly circles after the last quarter of the nineteenth century when modern critical methods cast the Bible as a literal, historical document in a dubious light. Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Press, 1974).

Intellectuals and liberals erroneously assumed that since the Bible could not stand up to scientific standards, the evangelical Christian religion that was based on its literal interpretation would gradually be discredited. Especially after the struggle between progressives and the forces of orthodoxy over Darwinian theory that culminated in the Scopes trial in 1925, most academicians considered the case closed. They convinced themselves that the general population would eventually share their skepticism, and rarely, since then, did historians and social scientists assign biblical literalism a causative role beyond that of a conservative, restrictive impediment or a nostalgic gesture.[\[footnote\]](#) [Author's note, 2010: Following the rise of the religious right in the national elections of 1979 and that movement's considerable influence on American politics in the decades since, a large body of scholarship on the influence of conservative Protestant religion in contemporary culture has been produced.]

The resurgence of interest in spiritual and emotional experiences that accompanied the cultural ferment of the late 1960s and early 1970s and the emergence of evangelicals as a political force in the late 1970s has initiated a revival of interest in conservative Christianity and a reinterpretation of its influence in twentieth-century America. A few examples are: David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *The Evangelicals* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975); Charles Y. Glock and Robert N. Bellah, *The New Religious Consciousness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); and Martin E. Marty, *A Nation of Behavers* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976).

Despite this lack of serious attention by intellectuals through most of the twentieth century, the popular American mind continued to hold to the symbols and tenets of a literal biblical faith with tenacity and to argue some issues on its terms. Women's rights are a prominent example. The same reasoning used in the nineteenth century to detract from the expansion of the female role was used to resist ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s and early 1980s. The creation order of man before woman, particularly in the family, and the inherent weakness of the second sex are ideas founded in the biblical myth and so deeply rooted in our cultural subconscious that, until the late twentieth century, only radical feminists resisted them. Despite the weight this view of woman has borne in supporting disparity of domestic arrangements (and, therefore, of society), no tough, well-reasoned thought was developed to counter it before the 1970s.[\[footnote\]](#) Instead, a self-denying, supporting model of womanhood was incorporated into the feminist movement early in the 1900s; and while it provided a comforting rationale for woman's political and economic liberation and helped secure certain advances, including the right to vote, it also limited the scope and degree of real change.

William L. O'Neill, *Everyone Was Brave* (New York: Quadrangle/ The New York Times Book Co., 1969), p. 358.

Paradoxically, bibliolatry, as practiced in America, has not been uniform and simplistic in its advocacy of a traditional hierarchy of sexes. Opposing these conservative forces has been an emphasis on scriptural sources that promoted the supremacy of the individual. Central to Reformation theology was a diminution of the efficacy of an institution or its functionaries to mediate between a believer and the deity. Ultimately, that individualistic notion, formulated as the "priesthood of all believers," was a key concept in the cultural revolution that has transformed the western world since Martin Luther's time. The theme was an important one in the centuries of settlement and formation of government in America, and the democratic system that resulted was in many ways a secular manifestation and amplification of its individualistic thrust.

Despite efforts by some colonists to impose communal order and discipline, the abundance of land and lack of tradition in the New World quickly weakened the organicism and hierarchy of the Old. With unprecedented

opportunity, individuals stood alone—not just before God, but before an open continent, as well. Those who attempted to maintain a balanced stance toward both the Word and the West found biblical teaching to support their position. The concept of freedom before God was extended to freedom from all institutional restraints and to the withdrawal of the government from exercising any control over religion.

Churches themselves tended to develop into democratic institutions, emphasizing the ultimate power and freedom of the individual members. By the nineteenth century, the pattern of free churches transmitted from Europe to New England reached independent extremes in the proliferation of evangelical sects on the American frontier. Charismatic evangelists vied with one another for the conversion of sinners in a competitive religious scene that had no parallel in the European manifestation of the Free Church tradition. In isolated congregations, lay members decided everything from the call of a minister to the acceptance of newcomers by majority vote, including women among the voters long before they were franchised by the state.

In small communities and frontier settlements where there were few church members of either sex to fill teaching and benevolent roles, women stepped in and took an active part in these areas, leading the way, as well, in burgeoning mission efforts. The church was the first place outside the home a woman went unapologetically to learn about wider causes, develop skills, and form strengthening bonds with her "sisters." Ironically, churches became woman's launching pad into the murky atmosphere of wider public life and, at the same time, legitimated time-honored patterns that firmly delineated the distance she could rise.

Studies of the history of feminism acknowledge the role religion played in simultaneously fostering and resisting innovations in woman's sphere. In a suggestive article published in 1966, Barbara Welter revealed the religious piety that lay at the core of the restrictive nineteenth-century model of ideal womanhood.[\[footnote\]](#) *The Southern Lady*, by Anne Firor Scott, further documents that pious mentality in Southern women, but translates it into an activism that resulted in widespread organization beyond the religious realm.[\[footnote\]](#) Nancy F. Cott's elegant essay on the definition of woman's

sphere from 1780-1835 identifies religion as a strong force in assisting females of that period to define their usefulness and provide group solidarity.[\[footnote\]](#) The "sisters," however, achieved less positive objectives than group identity, according to Ann Douglas, who claims that in the late nineteenth century, they joined with the disestablished clergy to impose their bankrupt piety, reduced to sentimentalism, on the culture at large.[\[footnote\]](#)

Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, 18 (1966), 151-174.

Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970).

Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).

That the woman suffrage movement fought religious forces is recognized in virtually every analysis of its development; Aileen Kraditor even gives a description of the problems with biblical exegesis encountered by the suffragists.[\[footnote\]](#) Most studies, however, deal with the encounter between religion and feminism that occurred in the nineteenth-century phase of the movement. They concentrate their focus on leading women who ceased to be controlled by biblical literalism, either by embracing modern textual criticism as a way of interpreting the Bible in favor of expanded rights for women or by dismissing Christianity as irrelevant to modern life. Particularly in the urbanized and industrialized northeast, these activists moved beyond church-related activities into the temperance movement, settlement house work, women's clubs, and labor and pro-suffrage organizations, all of which enlarged their avenues of power and attacked social ills in a more direct fashion. Or, having exhausted their impulse to social service, they moved toward the consumer-oriented secularism Ann Douglas describes.

Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), pp. 67-8.

These attempts to understand the leaders of the feminist movement and the women who first participated in an industrial work pattern are instructive

about the sexual definition and accommodation of contemporary times, but those who heralded societal change were exceptional within their period and do not exhaust the subject of the relationship between the Bible and the role of women. The average American woman maintained her literal faith long after feminist leaders became disillusioned. Throughout the twentieth century many females continued to order their lives and make sense of their experiences in the light of a biblical interpretation that upheld both male supremacy and individual freedom.

The popular mind's tenacious hold on biblical authority, the conflicting claims made on women by that allegiance and the uneven success of women's intermittent attempts to join the democratic, egalitarian current moving through United States history led me to undertake this study of the interplay between the Bible and women's role in American society. The primary issues that shaped my investigation included: In what way was the Bible authoritative to those who espoused its teachings? How did their beliefs inform the role of those women who claimed allegiance to biblical authority? Did those parts of the Bible that pertained to feminine nature and role shape the changes that occurred in women's lives? Was the Bible reinterpreted to accommodate general cultural patterns? Or was it simply ignored? To answer these questions, I decided to examine a biblically conservative group at a period of time when the role of women, both within the group and within society as a whole, was changing. Texas Baptists met all the criteria.

Although waves of change that included new forms of work in urban, industrial settings, the application of scientific analysis to all areas of learning, and a breakdown of traditional social structures began transforming American culture in the nineteenth century, Texas remained isolated from their effects until after the Civil War. That event marked Texans' awareness of a new order, but frontier conditions and the disarray of Reconstruction postponed its reaching the state for a couple of decades. Texas, therefore, entered the 1880s with the implications of modernity present—certainly with a recognition that the world was changing—but with its rural settlements still more closely resembling the pre-industrial world than the coming order. Land was still plentiful and much of it was undeveloped. The population was small and scattered and engaged

predominantly in agriculture. Anglos, primarily from the Deep South, had settled in the southern and eastern part of the state, while those from Arkansas, Tennessee, and Missouri formed communities in north Texas. Pockets of blacks were interspersed through south and east Texas, Germans, Slavs, and Scandinavians in central Texas, and Mexicans toward the southern border.[\[footnote\]](#)

D. W. Meinig, *Imperial Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), pp. 46-56.

Strains of the open West, the transitional border states, and the traditional South were blended in Texas, but it was a duplication of none since it bore clear marks of all, combined with the influence of European and Mexican migrations. There was no single, deeply rooted culture that had to be broken down before a new order could emerge, although east Texas had particularly close ties with the social and political institutions of the South, as well as intimate family connections. The proliferation of both wealth and population between 1880 and 1920 in this vital, but unstructured setting made it an excellent laboratory in which to observe forces of modernization emerge and develop.

The Baptists of my research are those aligned with the Southern Baptist Convention. I am aware there were other active Baptist groups within the state between 1880 and 1920, including Negro Baptists, Mexican Baptists, German Baptists, and anti-missionary Primitive Baptists, but those who formed the Baptist General Convention of Texas were by far the largest and most influential body. Although they were less numerous in Texas than Methodists in 1880, they were the largest denomination by 1920, and remained so until the end of the twentieth century, when immigration from Mexico and Central America raised Roman Catholicism to the number-one position. Their development closely paralleled that of the state and partook of and shaped the general cultural ethos. The doctrinal importance of the Bible, which they emphasize and proclaim as their "sufficient and sole authority,"[\[footnote\]](#) is a distinguishing mark of the group and fits them for a study of the importance of that ideology in understanding and dealing with contemporary life. Along with Biblical inerrancy, however, they stand firmly for religious equality and the right of every believer to read and

interpret Scripture for him- or herself, providing the tension between authority and freedom I intend to investigate.

L. R. Elliott, ed., *Centennial Story of Texas Baptists*, Chicago: Hammond Press, 1936), p. 14.

As subjects of research, both Texas and Baptists provide alternatives to data found in most studies of feminism, which tend to center on the Northeast, on progressives in the women's liberation movement, or on women of the Deep South. Concentration on Texas Baptist women is not a matter of giving unwarranted attention to a fringe element with no real place in society, but an attempt to understand another group of "average" Americans and their distinctive model of femininity.

The year 1880 was chosen for the beginning date of my research because it was then that Baptist women formed their first statewide organization. The denomination itself was also moving toward a general consolidation of state territorial conventions and other agencies, an event that occurred in 1886. While this activated the mechanism that ultimately brought financial and numerical success to Texas Baptists, it also raised issues regarding power, control, and centralization that fired a strong resistance. The 1880s and 1890s are, therefore, a good theater for observing the effects of population growth, advances in communication, competing organizational forms, and the development of denominational leaders to move the new masses. The uneven course of progress is replete with evidence of tradition warring against innovation, of old forms being quickly shed or reluctantly left behind, of new ideas being warmly embraced or hesitantly proposed.

By 1920 Texas had clearly made the transition into an urban-industrial economy. Oil had been discovered; industry and population followed in its wake. Among Baptists, the forces of consolidation that had tentatively gathered were firmly entrenched. Strong leaders had emerged and had led the church in successful evangelistic efforts and building (churches, schools, hospitals) campaigns. No part of the organizational effort was more successful than that of women. The total contribution of Texas Baptist women to mission causes through Woman's Missionary Union, their auxiliary to the state and national convention, grew from \$35.45 in 1880 to \$708,123.99 in 1920. Women were seated as equal "messengers" [\[footnote\]](#)

at the Southern Baptist Convention in 1918. Finally, the passage of the suffrage amendment in 1920 verified new status for females nationwide. Although the closing date of this research is somewhat arbitrary, change of sufficient magnitude in the general culture, the church, and its members is present in the 40-year span to measure its effects. By 1920 the main lines of the development of the Baptist women's movement had been set out and the changes that occurred were the working out of directions already set or were changes of magnitude and scale, rather than of essential nature. The story of the personalities and incidents that interrupted the state denominational scene in the 1920s would complicate this narrative, yet not illuminate the issue of women's rights.[\[footnote\]](#)

Although "delegate" and "delegation" are sometimes used by Baptists to refer to the participants in associational meetings (regional, state, or national), "messenger" is the preferred designation, clarifying the fact that the associational body has no authority over the local church and that the local church's authority cannot be delegated to any individual or group. Primary among these disrupters was J. Frank Norris, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Fort Worth and prominent figure in the national "Fundamentalist" movement of the 1920s, a conservative social and religious reaction to evolution and modern biblical criticism. Norris wielded political clout in Texas and ultimately organized a Baptist fellowship in competition with the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Southern Baptist Convention. There are numerous studies of the Fundamentalists. Two recommendations include one of the original works and a recent summary: Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) and George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

The central theme of change in Baptist women's role was power—the assumption of personal power and the exercise of institutional power. Between 1880 and 1920, Texas Baptist women increased their self-esteem and the range of their influence and activities—therefore, their power—but rather than claim they were participating in a general cultural shift exemplified by the expansion of individual rights, they justified these changes in terms of their biblical faith. For them, the Bible was the bedrock

of belief; not only did they subscribe to its message, but they read it as a literal document, its every word true in a legalistic sense.

Chapter Topics

Through both commands and examples, the Bible offers a variety of instructions to and impressions of the female sex. Chapter II contains a discussion of the content of that material, dividing it under four general headings: 1) the narratives of creation and the fall of Adam and Eve, 2) Jewish law and tradition, 3) the life and teachings of Jesus, and 4) the literature of the early church. During the span of this study, Texas Baptists altered their use of these materials. They moved from an emphasis on the restrictive nature of woman's role to an emphasis on her freedom "in Christ." They also shifted their hermeneutical method somewhat, in favor of principles over legalities, but they did not change their basic stance on the authoritative nature of the Bible, nor were biblical directives uniformly reinterpreted. The patriarchal basis of the Judeo-Christian tradition was retained in males' exclusive right to certain spheres of privilege and responsibility.

As defensive as they were about believing the entire Bible and only the Bible, Texas Baptists were inheritors of other intellectual strains that shaped the direction and limits of change in women's roles. Most important among these were democratic, egalitarian thought; hierarchical, paternalistic traditionalism; and a merchandising mentality. In their thinking, these ideas were inextricably bound up with biblical truth, not just an ideological blend distinctive of the nineteenth-century American frontier. These extra-biblical perceptions are briefly discussed in Chapter II to complete a description of the intellectual climate imbibed by Southern Baptists in Texas.

The most effective expression of Baptist women's assumption of power was their organization of women and children to support missionary causes. Their efforts were part—perhaps, during the period of this study, the most successful part—of a general denomination movement toward consolidation to assure the success of broader goals than single congregations could achieve. Chapter III details the formation and growth of Baptist women's

groups in Texas, but it begins by outlining the context of general denominational expansion in which the women's movement took place.

Prior to the Civil War, the story of Baptists in Texas is one of few members and struggling institutions, centered mainly in the south-central part of the state around Independence. After Reconstruction Baptists experienced growth and a haphazard proliferation of overlapping organizations that they pulled into a unified state convention 1886. The effort to effect this consolidation produced strong leaders, as well as resistance and backlash from separatist elements in the 1890s, but the organizing forces won the day. The denomination grew in membership, wealth, and acumen in the early twentieth century; a new power structure, built of a state newspaper, universities and a seminary, urban ministers, and denominational officers, assured the burgeoning bureaucracy of success. At the same time, there was ambiguity regarding new bases of power, resulting in vague theological formulations and a strong nostalgia for simpler times and solutions.

Baptist women's activities fit within this structure—they moved from scattered, awkward individual and group efforts to a sophisticated, well-run army of women and children missionary workers. But the path was not unbroken by resistance, nor was their accomplishment unmarked by discrimination, inequality, and compromise. In the early period of frontier settlement, women rarely had time and means, much less freedom and social approval, to fill leadership roles in religious circles, but their influence was substantial. They were charter members of all the early Texas Baptist churches, prominent financial contributors, organizers of benevolent "circles," and students at Baylor University from its founding in 1846. The impetus to play a more significant role, particularly in the denomination's growing mission effort, came from both a distant and a local source: the farther call was from the Southern Baptist Convention report in 1878 on Women's Work, enjoining churches to "help these women who labor with us in the gospel." "[[footnote](#)] The more specific and urgent call came from Anne Luther, who wanted to serve as a missionary, and her neighbor in Independence, Fannie Breedlove Davis, who invited Baptist women in Texas to meet with them in October, 1880, during the annual state convention in Austin. From this meeting the state Woman's Missionary Union (hereafter, abbreviated "WMU") was formed. Anne Luther went to

Brazil on appointment from the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention; Fannie Davis served as president of the Texas WMU from 1880 to 1895 and was present in Richmond, Virginia, for the founding of the south-wide WMU in 1888.

Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1878, p. 31. Quoting Philippians 4:3.

Fannie Davis was one of three presidents who served Texas WMU between 1880 and 1920, each offering a different style of leadership to guide the "union" through its formative stage and consolidation phase to its successful achievement of organization at four levels, from congregation to state, including women and children of all ages. Under each president methods of expanding the organization and generating collections were developed, different projects were undertaken, and significant personalities emerged. The presidential administrations, therefore, provide a convenient means of dividing the narrative of Chapter III.

Although missionary organizations provided an exceptional opportunity for conservative religious women to unite their efforts and gain access to denominational power through the expansion of their skills and the generation of large amounts of money, the direct exercise of that power was problematic. Their organization was only accorded auxiliary status and their collections were forwarded to mission boards, composed entirely of males, for distribution. Women's skills in management and public speaking were valuable tools to aid in the denomination's evangelistic task, but incorporating them into the programs of local churches challenged the existing male leadership and the biblical injunction for women to be submissive to males.

Chapter IV covers women's efforts to assert themselves in sexually segregated activities at the congregational level, both at home and abroad. Accommodation was generally smooth in benevolent and educational areas, both of which fit a traditional definition of femininity, but corporate worship and church government introduced the contradictory claims of service and submission. For women to expand their religious sphere while maintaining fidelity to a legalistic interpretation of Christianity entails a

fundamental struggle between assertion and subordination that continues to trouble evangelicals.

Missions capitalized on a woman's need both to nurture and to exercise personal power. The Texas Baptist women who volunteered for missionary service had an opportunity to respond to the demands of their beliefs in settings with less institutional restriction and more immediate and explicit demands than were provided at home. Two Texas women—Anne Luther Bagby, who went to Brazil in 1880, and Annie Jenkins Sallee, who served in China from 1906 to 1942—provide interesting case studies of women's behavioral and attitudinal changes accompanying the practice of their Baptist faith in different cultures.

Chapter V moves from the explicitly religious realm to other aspects of Baptist women's lives and focuses on the way Christian goals were translated into character models, educational pursuits, marriage, motherhood, and the exercise of civic responsibility. It was in these areas that the informal, physical quality of frontier life characteristic of Texas in the nineteenth century provided a balancing effect to the passive, protected ideal of womanhood that flourished in the East and South. In a frontier setting, the sexes shared many tasks and aspirations, and that experience paved the way for women's seeking a broader sphere of activity and influence. An interesting facet of this development is the pride and self-definition many women manifested while operating within the ultimate limits of patriarchal authority.

Notes on Sources

The most valuable primary source for my research were Baptist state newspapers, particularly the *Baptist Standard*, owned and published by individuals prominent in denominational circles until 1914, when it was purchased by the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Appearing weekly from 1892, the newspaper covered women's events and organizations and published women's writing on a special interest page. I utilized, however, the entire paper, gaining other insights into the attitude toward women's role through obituaries, editorials, reprints of sermons and speeches, and advertisements. The paper also gave an interesting and comprehensive

reflection of Texas life, including coverage of selected political events and personalities, reflections of its various editors, news from all Baptist institutions, reports from pastors and laymen, query columns and letters from readers, short stories, even advertisements for stock in the San Jacinto Oil Company.[\[footnote\]](#) Prior to 1892, Texas Baptists spoke through several lesser newspapers: the *Texas Baptist Herald*, the *Texas Baptist*, and, between 1886-88, the *Texas Baptist and Herald*, a combination of the two. *Baptist Standard* (Dallas), March 20, 1902, p. 2.

Proceedings and minutes from the state convention, the Southern Baptist Convention, and Woman's Missionary Union (both state and national) were important sources, although coverage of their meetings in the *Baptist Standard* often included informal comments and additional information.

Books written during the period by Texas Baptist women were scarce, restricted to a few reminiscences by missionaries, collections of speeches, and local women's organizational histories. Books written by men about women were not enlightening; rather, they were predictable and didactic. Baylor University archives contain women missionaries' papers that were delightful resources, as were the interviews I conducted with several evangelical women who grew up in Texas between 1890 and 1920.

Three Baptist histories could be considered primary resources: Z. N. Morrell's *Fruits and Flowers in the Wilderness*, printed in 1882, J. B. Link's two-volume *Texas Historical and Biographical Magazine*, published in 1891-92, and J. M. Carroll's massive *A History of Texas Baptists*, copyrighted in 1923. Two additional volumes, *Centennial Story of Texas Baptists*[\[footnote\]](#) and *The Blossoming Desert*[\[footnote\]](#) brought the state denominational story up to date in a more concise format. Histories of the Texas Baptist women's organization were published in the form of mission study books in 1933,[\[footnote\]](#) and in 1979.[\[footnote\]](#) Elliott, op. cit.

Robert A. Baker, *The Blossoming Desert: A Concise History of Texas Baptists* (Waco: Word Books, 1970).

Mrs. W. J. J. Smith, *A Centennial History of the Baptist Women of Texas: 1830-1930* (Dallas: Woman's Missionary Union of Texas, 1933).

Inez B. Hunt, *Century One: A Pilgrimage of Faith* (Dallas: Woman's Missionary Union, 1979).

The best studies of Baptist social thought concur with my evaluation of state denominational newspapers as the most valuable primary resource for this kind of research.[\[footnote\]](#) While these social histories assisted with bibliographical data and were generally informative, they dealt with the issue of women's rights briefly (Spain), not at all (Eighmy), or with women only in a marriage and family context (Kelsey). Paul M. Harrison's still excellent *Authority and Power in the Free Church Tradition*[\[footnote\]](#) was helpful in understanding the ambiguity present in a system in which discrepancies between doctrine and polity confuse the real locus of power, as they have come to (perhaps, always have) in Baptist circles. Numerous works on American church history amplified my understanding of evangelical Protestant Christianity in its prolific, New World flowering. John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972), p. 211; George D. Kelsey, *Social Ethics Among Southern Baptists, 1917-1969* (Metuchen, N. J.: The Scarecrow Press/American Theological Library Association, 1973), p. vi; Rufus B. Spain, *At Ease in Zion: Social History of Southern Baptists, 1865-1900* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1961), p. 215.

Paul M. Harrison, *Authority and Power in the Free Church Tradition: A Social Case Study of the American Baptist Convention* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959).

As mentioned previously, many studies of feminism and feminist ideology provided background information and acknowledged the importance of Christian dogma in shaping and maintaining women's role in our culture. One of these, *The Bonds of Womanhood* by Nancy F. Cott, was particularly important in the sense of confirming my choice of subject matter and shaping my conclusions. It is the rare example of a critical study of ordinary women, the author of which demands no more enlightenment and foresight of her subjects than their own culture provided and judges their achievements by the light of their own possibilities rather than those of another time and place.

Without elevating my subjects to sainthood (which they do not deserve) or denigrating their movement toward liberation as insignificant (which it was not), I would like to tell their story with the same sense of fairness and thoroughness. They, too, were ordinary women, attempting to accommodate deeply engrained beliefs with conflicting cultural forces. Biblical wisdom had made it seem simple: "Train up a child in the way [she] should go: and when [she] is old, [she] will not depart from it."[\[footnote\]](#) Or would she? Proverbs 22:6 (King James Version).

From Submission to Freedom: Ideology Informing Baptist Women's Role

One of the basic tenets of orthodox Christianity in all ages has been adherence to the teaching of the Bible. Clerics and scholars have searched its contents for precise meaning; differing interpretations, even on minor points, have led to decades of warfare, national schism, and, ultimately, the geographical and psychological shaping of Western civilization. These searches have produced diverse results because of variation in the skill and bias of the group involved in the research, the evaluative material available to them, and the weight of other authoritative traditions.

Nineteenth-century Baptists, as inheritors of the European and American tradition of religious dissent, supplanted the authority of the church with the authority of the biblical message, personally interpreted and confirmed by a salvation experience. The emphasis was on the individual and, in some cases, insights were arrived at by the lone believer with Bible in hand, but this picture is overdrawn. As soon as groups of believers gathered and formed churches, an organizing principle began working against this atomistic, totally individualistic formula. The movement toward stability often took the form of credal statements and uniform interpretive methods that sought to certify the purity of the gospel that was proclaimed. Granted, subjective sectarianism always carried within it a tendency toward disagreement and division, but there is invariably another pull toward credibility and rationality. Among Baptists, that cohesive power has been tenuous enough to be defined as "a rope of sand and an exceedingly slender rope at that,"[\[footnote\]](#) but one of its strongest links has been complete acceptance of the literal accuracy of the Bible.

L. R. Elliott, ed., *Centennial Story of Texas Baptists*, Chicago: Hammond Press, 1936), p. 6.

The evangelical Protestant groups that proliferated in America's early national period shared a common objective: to return to the "pure conditions of primitive Christianity"[\[footnote\]](#) that had been lost or obscured by the corruption of the institutional church. They, like other groups before them, believed that the key to the discovery of that ancient order was the record preserved in Holy Scripture. Without the mediation of priests or ecclesiastical tradition, this written record was viewed as the sole

source of religious authority. Although more learned seekers utilized conservative commentaries that referred to New Testament Greek to define key words such as *baptizo* (to dip, to plunge, to immerse), most church members' religious library consisted only of the English Bible. Their methodological approach to this body of literature has been criticized as being haphazard and unscientific, but it actually partook heavily of the rational scientific method of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.

[\[footnote\]](#) They granted that some mysteries lay beyond the human realm, but believed that those aspects of the Bible that called for man's perception and response were obvious and held no contradictions. "Revealed religion" could pass the same tests of reason and evidence to which any hypothesis or experience was subjected. The evangelicals added an important assumption—specifically, that the biblical record was divine revelation of truth—but their approach was similar to that of the deists, freethinkers, and republicans who affirmed that truth was apparent to and congruent with the rationality and common sense of ordinary men and women. The method and presupposition remained in scholastic good graces until they were discounted by Darwinism in the latter half of the nineteenth century and appear strongly anachronistic in the cynical, pluralistic society of the late twentieth century.[\[footnote\]](#)

Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1962), p. 83.

David E. Harrell, Jr., *Quest for a Christian America* (Nashville: Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1966), pp. 26-7.

The Fundamentalist movement, spawned in the 1920s, was a nationwide reassertion of this early nineteenth-century view of rational biblical authority. Its religious and social dimensions are discussed in Louis Gasper, *The Fundamentalist Movement* (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1963); Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); and LeRoy Moore, Jr., "Another Look at Fundamentalism: a Response to Ernest Sandeen," *Church History*, 37 (1968), 195-202.

Accepting the premise that the Bible contained a concrete and tangible system of thought that was authoritative and final, Baptists sought to decipher its pattern logically and follow it faithfully. Through the middle of the nineteenth century, most Americans shared their view of the "plenary inspiration" of the Bible, "believing," according to Aileen Kraditor, "that

the Scriptures were literally the word of God, infallible not only in matters of moral and religious truth but also in regard to statements of scientific, historical, and geographical fact."[\[footnote\]](#) Kraditor adds that the vast majority still held these convictions in the 1880s.[\[footnote\]](#) In Texas, as in other frontier and rural areas, the inerrancy of the Bible, as interpreted rationally and heightened with the emotional heat of evangelistic fervor, was synonymous with "pure and undefiled religion." This formula, born of the extension of the Protestant Reformation into the age of science, was endowed with timeless authority by nineteenth-century Americans, connecting them with first-century Christians in a pure line of certitude. Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 64
ibid., p. 65.

Although a radical Reformation, biblical-centered version of Christianity dominated the intellectual climate of Texas Baptists, there were other ideological winds whose force helped form their opinions and guide their activities. They did not separate these strains from Christianity, but read them into the biblical witness. These ideas, however, existed apart from Christianity and it from them in other ages and cultures. In the nineteenth century they had temporarily blended to inform and reflect the burgeoning cultural pattern of southern and frontier American life.

Primary among the ideas they drew from the general culture was the democratic tradition, with which they had strong historical association. "Baptists are democrats of the purest strain," they have loved to claim. [\[footnote\]](#) "Our ideas have always been democratic. . . The competency of the individual soul in the presence of his God has always been a Baptist fundamental . . . whenever the kingdoms of the world become complete democracies they will have to adopt the Baptist form of government." [\[footnote\]](#) Paul M. Harrison claims that the Calvinist fore-fathers of the Baptists were concerned with the issue of freedom, but they primarily emphasized the freedom of God and secondarily that of man and the local church. By the nineteenth century, however, "a theological individualism displaced the concern for God's sovereignty, and . . . the Baptists placed almost exclusive emphasis upon the sovereignty of man and the freedom of the local congregations from any form of ecclesiastical control."[\[footnote\]](#)

Baptist Standard (Waco), May 15, 1919, p. 16. Hereinafter in these notes this publication will be referred to as "BS." The place of publication from inception until February 3, 1898, was Waco, Texas; from that date it was published in Dallas, Texas.

BS September 16, 1914, p. 19.

Paul M. Harrison, *Authority and Power in the Free Church Tradition: A Social Case Study of the American Baptist Convention* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), pp. 11-12.

Baptists traced their democratic heritage all the way back to New Testament times when Peter said "we ought to obey God rather than man," and thereby asserted the "doctrine of soul liberty."[\[footnote\]](#) They claimed that "each church that was organized during the apostolic times was a pure democracy. All questions that were decided by the churches were taken before the entire membership, and, after explanation and discussion, the entire membership acted upon them."[\[footnote\]](#) They believed, in fact, that Christianity had given democracy to the world through the pure line that Baptists had transmitted. They asserted, without evidence, that Thomas Jefferson studied Baptist polity when he was writing the Constitution, and Baptist principles were "everywhere in the warp and woof of that immortal document."[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, September 1, 1892, p. 4.

BS, April 9, 1914, p. 19.

BS, July 16, 1914, p. 19.

The flowering of liberal democracy and left-wing Protestantism at the same time did mix the ideals and practices of the two; Baptists partook of secular humanistic principles just as inheritors of the Enlightenment erected a "heavenly city." An original theological focus on the power of God was countered by secular philosophies and shifted to the possibilities of the individual. Bound by a historical perspective they could not transcend, Baptists felt no compromise when they "crossed the bridge from religious non-conformity to liberal democracy,"[\[footnote\]](#) from John Calvin to John Locke.

Harrison, p. 25.

Despite their efforts to dispense with ecclesiastical authority in favor of the rights and responsibilities of each individual, Texas Baptists also retained vestiges of traditional organicism into the twentieth century. The bulwark of their traditionalism was the family. The Bible was written in a patriarchal culture; the family life depicted therein reflected that pattern and upheld it as an ideal.

Many Texans had migrated from the South, where family affiliation and duties were also glorified. "Knowing one's place" was a lesson well-learned in that society. Frontier conditions and the Civil War ameliorated the elaborate social rituals that distinguished the sexes and carefully marked their spheres, but images of dependent women in need of protector males for direction and support persisted. Baptists were enjoined to maintain hierarchical family arrangements lest natural law, as well as God's, be transgressed and society destroyed. Not only the authority of males and husbands, but also that of parents was accepted and idealized. Word pictures of "life's golden hours . . . around the family hearthstone with father and mother," who always knew best,[\[footnote\]](#) connoted a longing for affiliation and domination.

BS, October 31, 1895, p. 8.

Within the church the source of authority and cohesion was the Bible rather than ranking church officials, but this source provided a rallying point for fellowship and unity. The church, which, as the body of Christ, has traditionally served as an organic idea, was greatly reduced in power from the medieval giant it had been; but church membership and attendance, one's identity as a Baptist among other Baptists, was still a strong social force among the committed. An irony of Southern Protestantism is that the individualistic emphasis of the religion is both an enforcer of conformity and a source of identification.[\[footnote\]](#)

John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972), p. 201.

Baptists continued to emphasize their commitment to local autonomy, but after they entered the missionary movement in the late nineteenth century, denominational machinery became stronger and more influential.

Theoretically, these cooperating groups and leaders possessed no authority over congregations and church members, but in reality, they exerted tremendous power. Southern Baptists continued to give lip service to the pre-eminence of the working of the Holy Spirit among individuals joined in an independent community setting, while they were influenced increasingly by highly rationalized, bureaucratic organizations based on a national scale. [\[footnote\]](#) Both the growth of a centralized denominational authority and the strong patriarchal strain of Southern Baptist familial ethic are borrowed from the general culture and sit incongruously alongside the democratic elements of the Baptist belief system.

This conclusion was reached regarding the American Baptist Church (Northern) by Paul M. Harrison in *Authority and Power in the Free Church Tradition*, and was applied to the Southern Baptists by Donald F. Trotter, "A Study of Authority and Power in the Structure and Dynamics of the SBC," Thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1962. An excellent, more recent application of American business policy to the development of Protestant bureaucracies is made by Ben Primer, *Protestants and American Business Methods* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1979).

Diverse cultural influences notwithstanding, the fundamental ideology of Texas Baptists--including their models and vocabulary of gender roles--was drawn from biblical texts. Recreating their ideology with regard specifically to women, therefore, entails both an examination of pertinent texts and of the uses to which those passages were put. The latter element of research was most readily accomplished by examining Texas Baptist newspapers during the period, extracting all biblical references to women. These were contributed by a number of authors, ministers, and letter-writers, both women and men, from various parts of the state over the forty-year period from 1880 to 1920, and they form legitimate bases for determining public opinion and usage. Because of the democratic nature of Baptist church government, the newspapers were generally sensitive to their constituencies--average church members, as well as ministers and leaders. They allowed, even encouraged, diverse opinion to be expressed in their open-forum format. Of course, editorial control determined the prominent stance taken, but dissenting views, particularly on a subject as controversial as this one, were given space.

Baptist sermons and publications from 1880 to 1920 were rife with phrases that emphasized the discernible and unchanging nature of revelation; "within scriptural limits," "God's revealed truth," and "the eternal verities of God's abiding word" were common.^[footnote] "Theology has nothing new in it, except that which is false. The preaching of Paul must be the preaching of the minister today,"^[footnote] stated the *Baptist Standard* in 1892. In 1900 it asserted: "There are no authorities among Baptists. There is one authority--the New Testament. Eminent scholars have great weight with us, but what they say or write is taken only as the opinion of fallible men and does not rank up to the authoritative point..."^[footnote] And in 1919 the *Standard* confidently reaffirmed that "the truth remains the Baptists have never changed any of the ordinances and practices of the New Testament."^[footnote]

BS, May 19, 1892, p. 7; September 1, 1892, p. 4; March 5, 1896, p. 5.

BS, September 1, 1892, p. 4.

BS, January 4, 1900, p. 2. At this writing, the question of authority was being directly challenged by the Baptist seminary at the University of Chicago and by its president, Dr. W. R. Harper.

BS, January 2, 1919, p. 8.

Before the turn of the century, the *Standard* printed lengthy sermons of a grave theological mode on subjects like "atonement," "the doctrine of authority," or a sound, if conservative, exegesis of a scriptural passage.^[footnote] The blessed assurance that the truth was theirs and was easily comprehensible to common folk, however, made the "query page" a more palatable way to discuss doctrinal topics. Running alongside the sermons in the 1890s and taking precedence in the twentieth century, these question-and-answer columns were written by a seminary professor or respected minister who would answer with a "proof text" from Scripture the textual, religious, or purely social questions sent in by readers. Questions ranged from the simple and less consequential ("Will you explain what is meant by the horse-leech in Prov. 30:15?")^[footnote] to the complex ("Some people claim that God is unjust if he allows disasters, etc., to overtake one. How can it be proved, that God is a merciful and loving God and blesses his followers?"),^[footnote] but the answer rarely took more than a few sentences, never more than two or three paragraphs. The implications were

clear: answers, even to religious questions, could be found at a single source, rather simply, and without serious contradiction.

These sermons were primarily those of B. H. Carroll, minister of the First Baptist Church, Waco, Texas, and founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

BS, April 24, 1902, p. 3.

BS, February 24, 1916, p. 19.

When questions regarding a woman's sphere, both in and out of the church, were raised, the response was generally handled efficiently. "This woman preacher business is against the Bible, against nature, and against common sense,"[\[footnote\]](#) said an 1894 editorial, bringing authority from spiritual, physical, and intellectual realms to bear on the subject. There was no doubt in the minds of those who expressed public opinion that the Bible was clear on the matter: "the most harmful feature of the new woman question is the fact that it can make no progress at all without setting aside the plain teaching of the Bible. If the passages of Holy Scripture which stand in the way of this woman's movement can be set aside at the dictum of those who favor the movement, why may not the passages which stand in the way of anything else be set aside at the demand of anybody who wishes to do anything contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures? This will probably be the end of the whole matter"[\[footnote\]](#) But it was not the end of the matter, and rapid social change called even for frontier Baptists to confront the idea of cultural relativity:

BS, September 20, 1894, p. 4.

BS, January 2, 1896, p. 1.

"God has established relations between men and between the sexes that apply to every age and condition of the race.... The obligation to worship God, to pray and to repent of sin was universal and bound all classes, in all generations. So in the family. The rules governing earthly fatherhood, requiring the parent to support the child and the child to submit to the authority of the father, were as far-reaching as geography and time. The husband and wife in Palestine and Egypt, in Philippi and Ephesus and Corinth and Colassae are addressed as under a divine law. The wives and mothers of the Bible were not under a different code of laws from women of the nineteenth century. The relation and the duties that grow out of the

family relation now are the same as they have always been and as they will be to the end of the world. Greece and Alexandria and Babylon were not so different in their civilizations as to induce the Lord God to give different revelations to suit the different conditions of society. The law governing women in China and America, in London and Mexico are the same.

[\[footnote\]](#)"

BS, March 4, 1897, p. 1. This is obviously a reprint since the author, M. V. Smith, died in 1893.

M. V. Smith, the author of the above passage, was associated with Baylor (Female) College at Belton, Texas, and staunchly defended women having a role in the church. Despite his firm stand on the unchanging will of God, he unwittingly revealed some difficulty (whether his own or his female parishioners') in accepting its message. "God has made one revelation," he restates; "he looked into the future and met the conditions of society in all generations, and we must accept it as reasonable and just." [\[footnote\]](#)

Another writer in the 1890s was more forthright in meeting the criticism that biblical sexual arrangements were unfair: "If [the Bible] denies to woman some rights and privileges accorded to men, it is for her own good."

[\[footnote\]](#)

Ibid.

BS, February 18, 1897, p. 3.

Equity aside, Baptists were convinced the Bible had once and for all time delineated woman's role. The substance and the boundaries of that definition were gleaned primarily from four portions of the biblical narrative: 1) the story of creation and the fall of Adam and Eve, 2) Jewish law and tradition, 3) the life and teachings of Jesus, and 4) the literature of the early church. These contributed material of considerable variety—character studies, legal formulae, moral and natural explanations—but in them biblicists found a divinely ordained pattern of feminine character and behavior. The following section will examine the key passages and examples from these four parts of the Bible that informed nineteenth- and twentieth-century Christian womanhood, analyzing cases of emphasis or avoidance on the part of Texas Baptists and noting conflicting or changing interpretations.

Creation and the Fall

The book of Genesis opens with two accounts of creation, one in chapter 1:1ff and another in chapter 2:4ff. Conservative Bible scholars credited Moses with the authorship of the entire Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), and no doubt considered the second telling to be an amplification of the first, rather simple, poetic account. Woman's place in the first story is straightforward, inseparable from the creation of man. On the sixth day of creation, after the introduction of animals, God said:

"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Gen. 1:26-28.)"

In the second account, minus the device of "days" and the gradual introduction of the elements of nature, the writer concentrates on explaining, with the creation story, some of the basic issues of human existence: sex, sin, and suffering. He rather quickly dispenses with the environment in order to deal with man himself: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). Then, with intimate details and a personal orientation, he relates the familiar story of the Garden of Eden: Adam was given the task of tending the fertile garden and the privilege of eating from all but the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." God, however, notes the unfinished state of his creation and says:

"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helpmeet for him. . . . And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord had taken from man, made he woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken

out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they be one flesh. (Gen. 2:18, 21-24.)"

The serpent then intrudes upon this idyllic setting and induces the woman to eat of the forbidden fruit and to give some to her husband. God's punishment comes swiftly: "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3:16). Adam is resigned to eking out a harsh existence from thorny soil; both are banished from the Garden and inflicted with eventual death.

Modern biblical scholarship affirms that the two accounts were actually written several hundred years apart; the second--the mythic drama--arose out of an early time and a primitive search for meaning that framed questions in relation to the culture as it existed and asked how these conditions had come to be. The "great hymn of creation"[\[footnote\]](#) found in chapter one was composed by a priestly poet who wrote four hundred years later during the exile from Jerusalem. His aims appear to be worship and artistic expression, extolling the sovereignty of God and the dignity of mankind in a progression of creative days, each climaxed with God's declaration that "it was good." But Baptists did not read these chapters either as a myth of origins or an ode on creation; rather, they understood them to be literal history, complete with the divine order for life in the present. Still, they had difficulty agreeing as to the precise details of the pattern for woman's character and work.

Georgia Harkness, *Women in Church and Society* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 145.

Asked in 1900 to describe "woman's sphere," one Baptist admitted, "There is probably no phase of practical religion on which those who wanted to know and teach the truth have taken more opposite positions or expressed more divergent views."[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, November 1, 1900, p. 2.

His advice was to look for an "underlying law" that governed all passages bearing on a particular subject. In the case of women, he declared the underlying law to be the "mutual dependence of the sexes in matters of human endeavor." That mutuality was not between equals, but was one in

which "man is the God-appointed principal and woman is the God-appointed helper or assistant." He based his opinion on the verse that made clear "the purpose for which woman was created": to be a helpmeet for man.

"God did not create man merely for man's existence sake, or that he might occupy a place in the activities of God's creatures. The females among the beasts were not called helps meet for the males, but when it came to the creation of man on whom should be laid the responsibilities and obligations growing out of his special endowments and his relation to God and the rest of God's creation, his wife was called his help meet. In meeting these responsibilities and fulfilling these obligations man's capacities and powers are such, his limitations and aptitudes are such that he needs another being so specially endowed as to be the help answering to him. That fact is not only taught in the Scriptures, but it is taught by the universal observation and experience of the race. Woman has also her limitations, and every wise woman recognizes that fact and in whatever she undertakes seeks the competent help of some man. [\[footnote\]](#)"

Ibid.

This God-given ranking was believed by some to apply in every instance, implying that women were innately inferior. "A very casual reading of the Scriptures," one writer explained, "will show that when in the past a significant thing was to be done for the Kingdom, God raised up a man to do it, and if he couldn't find a man he raised up a woman." [\[footnote\]](#)
BS, October 17, 1912, p. 1.

The emphasis, however, was more often given to the assisting, non-initiating role of women, rather than to their basic inferiority. When acting in her "natural position," a woman would "honor man" and, even better, "help him honor himself and God." [\[footnote\]](#) The same theme echoed in such statements as "the sisters are given to us to be helpers." [\[footnote\]](#) In 1917 another writer affirmed that the Christian woman "should ever act consistently with the leadership of man and her position as help-mate." [\[footnote\]](#)

BS, November 8, 1900, p. 3.

BS, October 22, 1903, p. 3.

BS, October 18, 1917, p. 30.

The same secondary, helping role was applied to the women's organization in relation to the church; in fact, the official name adopted in 1890 by the Southern Baptist women's group was "Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist convention." Opposition to the movement arose, some felt, from men who did not understand that the organic connection of the WMU with the convention was that of a "subordinate organization."[\[footnote\]](#) This appealing fact actually marked the Southern Baptist group as distinctive among women's missionary endeavors.

[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, May 19, 1892, p. 7.

Norman W. Cox, ed., *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), II, 1506.

James B. Gambrell, one of the male leaders most supportive of women, also advocated the interpretive tool of "a great principle governing the whole matter," but he understood that under that guiding role men were superior only in two realms: as head of their own household and as ordained ministers.[\[footnote\]](#) In other areas he asserted that women "manage themselves a great deal better than men succeed with the difficult task of managing themselves."[\[footnote\]](#) While he did not appeal specifically to the creation stories to support his more egalitarian view, it corresponds more with the tone of the first chapter of Genesis in which no order of creation nor inequality was implied and man and woman were jointly given domination of the earth.

BS, November 1, 1894, p. 1.

Ibid.

The latter interpretation, or a "softened" version of the helper motif, was more frequently appealed to in the twentieth century as women gained more confidence and stature. It was often couched in sentimental terms and was certainly accommodating rather than assertive, but it connotes a more positive image of femininity than that of inferior assistant. The following reinterpretation of the creation story demonstrates the sentiment:

"God has made woman, not from man's feet to be trampled upon by him, nor from his head to be ruled over, to be dominated by him, but from his

body to be his equal, from his side to be his helpmeet, from under his arm to be protected by him, and from near his heart to be loved by him.

[\[footnote\]](#)"

BS, February 24, 1916, p. 15; also July 2, 1914, p. 2, attributed to Matthew Henry.

C. C. Brown, an elderly minister, turned the subject around in an open letter to young women:

"You know I have sometimes been tempted to think the Bible was a little unfair towards women. We read there how God made a help meet for men; but is nowhere said that he ever made a help meet for women, and I have an idea that this is the one thing we are waiting for in this world. But I believe in evolution. Fact is, I am a genuine, all-around evolutionist, and I have a faith that this great desideratum is yet to grow up and be developed out of the common germinal biped known as man.[\[footnote\]](#)"

BS, August 16, 1894, p. 1.

This Baptist bias in favor of democracy did narrow the areas in which men exercised dominion over women (with a few important exceptions), but the relationship between the sexes was not negated nor was independence the result. The focus turned instead to the complementary nature of sexual interchange. "Woman's right to stand as man's copartner in making this world and in building a civilization has been slow of recognition," allowed one minister in 1914. "That woman is not the peer and equal of man is a fallacy unsupported in Scripture." In a rather whimsical reference to Genesis he explained: "I rather take the idea that the order, of creation, man first and then woman, suggests that woman was intended as an improved edition of man."[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, July 2, 1914, p. 2.

Indeed, the elevated view of femininity that developed in nineteenth-century America mediated against the traditional application of the Genesis narratives to denigrate women because of Eve's seductive nature and her primacy to sin. There are a few references to the moral inferiority of women; a 1900 temperance resolution reminded members of the women's organization that "our ancestor in Eden has in SOME way been blamed for all of the evils to which mankind is heir," but it went on to say that since

they were blamed, they should play a part in trying to eradicate those sins. [\[footnote\]](#) Even when Eve was blamed for bringing damnation on the world, Mary was credited with having given it a savior, preserving the favored view of womanhood. "Woman's life reaches both extremes," explained one writer, "and has the balance of power for good or evil in all ages." [\[footnote\]](#) Usually, even Eve is described, not in her shame, but in her glory, as "the beautiful, beautiful Eve, pure, lovely, perfect, so excellent, exalted, angelic" [\[footnote\]](#) or as "a perfect woman, as perfect a woman as could be made by a perfect God." [\[footnote\]](#) To counteract the usual claim of woman's superior piety, a rare writer in 1896 brought forth Eve's example and asserted that "women are just as depraved and sinful by nature, and too often by practice, as are the opposite sex." [\[footnote\]](#)

Minutes of the Baptist Women Mission Workers of Texas, 1900, p. 144.

Hereinafter this group will be referred to as "BWMW."

BS, December 18, 1902, p. 10.

Texas Baptist and Herald, February 2, 1887, n.p. Hereinafter this newspaper, published in Dallas, Texas, will be referred to as "TBH."

BS, July 2, 1914, p. 2.

BS, January 23, 1896, p. 2.

Whether making women the match of men at sinning or vice versa, the trend was toward an egalitarian yet interdependent view of sin and sexuality. "Adam was equal in the transgression and all humanity is under the load of sin," stated J. M. Dawson in 1913. [\[footnote\]](#) "A man is only half a human being. Woman is the other half. They two make one human being . . . God is really Mother as He is Father." [\[footnote\]](#)

BS, June 19, 1913, p. 2. Dawson, like Gambrell, had an extremely competent wife.

Ibid., p. 11.

Jewish law and tradition

By definition, the patriarchal order that characterized Old Testament Judaism limited women's role and rights extensively. A woman was subject to her father until she came under the dominion of her husband, or, in the event of his death, her husband's brother or her eldest son. A man could divorce his wife, but a woman could not give up her husband (Deut. 24:1-4). "The most typical Hebrew word for wife (ishshah) meant 'woman belonging to a man,' while one word for husband (baal) meant 'owner of property.' [\[footnote\]](#) The Law of Moses stipulated that women were unclean by virtue of their physiological functions (menstruation and childbirth) and provided for ritualistic isolation and purification after both (Lev. 12; 15:19-33). Following the birth of a male child, the purification period lasted thirty-three days; in the event of a female child, it was extended to sixty-six days.

William E. Hull, "Woman in Her Place: Biblical Perspectives," *Review and Expositor*, 72 (1975), 9.

The sacred and secular aspects of Hebrew life were so intertwined, it is not surprising that the subordination that prevailed in domestic arrangements was also present in religious activities. There was no office of priestess; women were not even allowed in the inner court of the Temple. "In the synagogues which replaced the Temple worship in the dispersion of the Jews, the women were not only separated from the men but were required to sit behind screens if they attended at all." [\[footnote\]](#) If a woman took a religious vow or obligation, it could be annulled by her husband or her father (Num. 30:3-16). Probably most important, rabbinic Judaism did not allow women to study the Torah, or the Law. "Salvation itself depended on knowledge of obedience to the Law. To exempt woman from this responsibility meant not only that the rabbis had a limited social outlook on woman's relation to man, but more important, that they had not dealt adequately with the ultimate question of her relation to God." [\[footnote\]](#) Although most of her religious service was performed as a spectator, a woman was allowed to partake of sacrificial meals and to participate in festivals, such as choral processions and cultic dances. And despite the restrictions, a rare woman did rise to a position of military or spiritual leadership, as in the cases of Deborah, Miriam, and Esther.

Harkness, p. 157.

Hull, p. 11.

Without doubt, the role of mother justified a woman's existence and gave her what status she had under Judaic law. Strict laws concerning chastity protected females from some kinds of sexual exploitation and were indicative of the high social value placed on family life. The honoring of mother, as well as father, was one of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:12). Well-known Old Testament love stories like that of Jacob and Rachel indicated that in single instances--like those of individual queens or prophetesses--an extraordinary regard for womanhood triumphed. Yet even the paean to "the virtuous woman" found in Proverbs 31:10-31 is a tribute accorded her for working tirelessly at domestic and commercial tasks for the comfort and honor of her husband. His is the position of honor among the elders at the city gates. Hers is a life of service.

In summary, the early Hebrew tradition and its codification gave females only slightly more rights than slaves, livestock, and other male-owned property. The privileges that were theirs were obtained primarily by virtue of their importance in maintaining family life and their indispensable role in providing male heirs to perpetuate the system. Under rabbinic Judaism of the late Old Testament and intertestamental period, there was a move from polygamy to monogamy and divorce became more rare, but women's religious standing did not improve. Her restriction against studying the Law forced her even further from the center of national piety. It is no wonder Hebrew men prayed, "I thank thee, Lord, that thou has not created me a woman."[\[footnote\]](#)

Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1975), p. 76.

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century Baptists inherited some of the taboos and restrictions of Jewish law because its traditions were carried over into the Christian church and thus into Western civilization, but the most common use they made of these Old Testament materials was to hold up the examples of individual women who exercised unusual leadership or were singled out as models of the industrious fidelity the system demanded.

Their theological justification for drawing on the tradition selectively was found in Galatians 3:23-26:

" But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

Most use of Old Testament materials was illustrative, calling forth the examples of ancient heroines of faith to stir contemporary women to action or devotion. Deborah, the judge who challenged the Israelites to overcome a Canaanite king, even leading them into battle (Judg. 4-5), was in most lists of 'unusual women. She exemplified woman's capacity to save a nation and to give it spirit and vitality; [\[footnote\]](#) with her "womanly arm" she hurled a host into battle. [\[footnote\]](#) In 1900 her story was used to illustrate the point that women should serve in leadership roles only when no men come forward to fill them. "Let not Deborah forget, in the hour of victory, that she is a woman, and that she is called forth for the emergency only" a male author begrudgingly admonished. [\[footnote\]](#) By 1915 a woman writer praised Deborah " for "out-ranking [a man] in her prowess and generalship," [\[footnote\]](#) with no qualifications on her right to do so. She was a "righteous challenge to cowardly and unprogressive men," added another in 1917. [\[footnote\]](#) Miriam, Moses' sister, was praised for "leading the Israelitish orchestra" in song and dance when they had successfully crossed the Red Sea (Exod. 15:20-21). Vashti, who "defied the bacchanal of a thousand drunken lords" and was removed from her throne rather than compromise her principles (Esther 1), and Esther, the queen who was "willing to throw her life away that she [might] deliver her people" (Esther 1-10), [\[footnote\]](#) were colorful favorites.

BS, May 6, 1897, p. 1.

BS, July 2, 1914, p. 2.

BS, November 8, 1900, p. 3.

BS, September 30, 1915, p. 2.

BS, October 18, 1917, p. 30.

BS, July 2, 1914, p. 2.

"I am not lacking in one sort of admiration for Deborah," wrote the editor of the Baptist Standard in a 1912 editorial, "and there is something to consider even in the character of Jezebel, who was an all-round iron woman of the most biting type," but "there is normally no such thing as an iron woman." He preferred to consider the "real women" of the Old Testament--"the gentle virtues of Rebecca, the kindly ministrations and generous love of Ruth gleaning in the field, the faith and moral devotion of Jephthah's daughter,"^[footnote] who was sacrificed as a result of an impulsive vow her father made (Judg. 10:6-11:40). This same sentimental glow colored the selection and interpretations made by other Texas Baptists who reached back into pre-Christian millenia for exemplary material. A woman writing in 1895 chose the building of the tabernacle (Exod. 35:21-29) to set a scene of dreamy-eyed maidens and earnest grandmothers spinning and weaving while they contemplated their escape from Egyptian slavery. "They had already given their gold bracelets and earrings with other ornaments for the use of the Tabernacle, and now they were giving of the work of their hands. How happy these women! How full of joy their hearts, that even for them, the home-keepers, some work had been found which they might do. . . ." Reading a nineteenth-century version of femininity into the Scriptures, she concluded that "we need not learn only from these Hebrew women to give and work for God; the Bible had many other examples of devotion, of industry, and of willing service on the part of woman."^[footnote] "A Talk With the Queen of the House," published in the Baptist newspaper in 1915, also drew on the Old Testament to glorify traditional female virtues. The Shunammite woman who ministered to the prophet Elisha (II Kings 4:8-37) provided the text: "Despite her obscurity and her humble environment she was the queen of a home and God called her great." And how was that greatness achieved? Through "the gentle, Godly grace of hospitality," "great . . . contentment with her sphere," and "religious character."^[footnote]

BS, March 28, 1912, p. 11.
BS, May 16, 1895, p. 7.
BS, April 8, 1915, p. 2.

Anxious to prove that women had talents, gifts that fell into the supportive, compliant range and could be used in the work of the church, most writers interpreted the biblical record in that light. In the selective eye of some, however, the physical and occupational separation of sexes that the Old

Testament detailed became blurred and in its place a democratic column of men and women, marching together for the Lord, appeared "The Bible . . . records chiefly the doings of men and women who, in the providence of God, were brought into places of responsibility and leadership. Back in the far reaches of our past, far beyond the time of our Redeemer, men and women, chosen of God, took their places in the front of the far-flung battle-line and waged their warfare for God and His cause with self-sacrifice and heroism,"[\[footnote\]](#) Mary H. Davis asserted in an address commemorating the opening of a women's missionary training school building at the Baptist seminary in Fort Worth. The "prominence" of Old Testament women was marked by another writer, who found there "examples of woman's leadership in every form of work undertaken by man."[\[footnote\]](#)
BS, September 30, 1915, p. 2.
BS, June 19, 1913, p. 2.

Generally speaking, the religious writers of 1880 to 1920 ignored the regulations and saw instead an image of their own experience or its idealization when they looked at Jewish history. Unusual leadership or heroism was applauded, but women were usually singled out for "devotion, industry, and service," that genteel blend of qualities that produced the paradox of women's being both elevated and patronized.[\[footnote\]](#) Several excellent articles and books describe this nineteenth-century phenomena, among them Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, 18 (1966), 151-174; and Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970).

The life and teaching of Jesus

Except in the matter of divorce, Jesus said nothing explicit about woman's position in religion or society, yet he is heralded by Christians as the key figure in the emancipation of women. Certainly he was the focus of faith and devotion for the female subjects of this study; the more women spoke and wrote on their own behalf, the more explicitly Christ-centered the material became. The emotional aspect of their piety often took precedence over rational content; their references to biblical passages bespoke more gratitude and reverence than argument and proof. The person and sacrifice of Jesus were the source of their devotion, but the record of that person and sacrifice was contained in the four gospels. The gospels refer to women among Jesus' disciples, women he healed, women who supported his ministry, women who appeared as characters in his parables, and women as they figured in his discussions of divorce. In part, his impact on the "woman issue" stems from what he refrained from saying. He chose no female apostles and led no feminist revolt, yet he did not reflect the strong antifeminism of his culture. [\[footnote\]](#)

Daly, p. 79.

An example of Jesus' reversal of Judaic sexism is found in the two accounts of his responding to the Pharisees' question on divorce rights:

"The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female. And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. (Matt. 19:3-9.)"

The Mark account (Mark 10:2-12), which was written earlier, gives no grounds for divorce and names each party equally guilty of adultery in remarriage.

These are as close to a theology of creation as Jesus provided. Feminist Biblical scholars tend to interpret them as a commentary on the original state of equality and grace intended "from the beginning of the creation," compromised by Moses because of the "hardness of men's hearts." Sin, therefore, established a system of male-dominance that Jesus did not sanction.[\[footnote\]](#) While this reading may reflect the scholars' cultural bias too strongly, Jesus did make a statement on the sacredness of marriage and claimed some equal rights for sexes within its vows.

Hull, p. 15.

The instances of Jesus' healing involved women as often as men, including his touching the ill person (Luke 13:11-13) or allowing her to touch him (Luke 8:43-48). In the latter passage, the woman had touched only the hem of his garment, yet when she was discovered "she came trembling and falling down before him." After she confessed she had contacted him and been healed, he responded, "Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith had made thee whole; go in peace." Other gospel passages refer to his healing Peter's mother-in-law while visiting in her home (Mark 1:29-31), casting an evil spirit from the daughter of a Greek Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24-30), and restoring to health the only daughter of Jairus, a synagogue ruler (Luke 9:41-42 49-56). The bereavement and subsequent delight of Jairus and his family gives evidence against the low regard with which the Jews held their female offspring and is a contrast to the humiliation expressed by the woman in Luke 8.

Jesus had other public encounters with women, sometimes to the bewilderment or disapproval of his companions. One such conversation was held with a Samaritan woman at a well (John 4:5-30). When Jesus asked her for a drink, she expressed amazement that he spoke to her, despised for her half-breed race as well as her sex. He then proceeded to give her two of his most eloquent lessons, one on spiritual sustenance, or "living water," and another on the transcendent life of his kingdom, characterized by a

worship beyond boundaries of place and ancestry. When his disciples came upon the scene, they "marvelled that he talked with the woman."

In another well-known incident of the Pharisees' testing Jesus, an adulteress, caught in the act, was brought before him (John 8:2-11). "Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?" her accusers asked.

"But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. And they heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord, And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. (John 8:6-11)."

Again, Jesus dealt with this woman and interpreted Jewish law in an irregular manner.

One story that is repeated in all four gospels is that of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfumed ointment from an alabaster box (Matt. 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, Luke 7:36-50, John 12:1-8). Then, weeping, she wiped his feet with her hair. In Luke the woman is identified as a "sinner" and the event was a dinner at the home of a Pharisee named Simon. John records a similar story involving Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, but the details of all four are much the same. In Matthew, Mark, and John, the woman is criticized by some for having wasted expensive perfume when it could have been sold and the profits given to the poor. Jesus asked the critics to leave the woman alone; she was anointing his body for burial. "For ye have the poor always with you," he explained, "but me ye have not always." Jesus' host, according to Luke's account, questioned Jesus' religious credentials because he allowed the sinful woman to touch him (some traditions claim she was Mary Magdalene). Jesus responded with a parable about a creditor who forgave both large debts and small. Then he turned to the Pharisee with a question: "Seest thou this

woman?" The intent was to mirror the contrast between the righteous host who was stingy with common courtesies and an outcast woman who displayed genuine love.

Jesus healed women, spoke with them, touched them and allowed them to touch him; there is evidence he numbered some among his friends and intellectual companions. Two women from Bethany named Mary and Martha seemed to fall into this category. A well-known passage from Luke 10:38-42 describes a visit Jesus made to their home. Mary sat and spoke with Jesus, while Martha "was cumbered about with much serving."

"Lord," she complained, "dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me."

In a reply any non-domestic female would applaud, Jesus chides: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part...."

The course of this friendship obviously ran deep. At a time when Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha, was ill, John records simply: "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus" (John 11:5).

Some of the women mentioned in these passages, female relatives, and others composed a group that followed Jesus and his male disciples, helping to finance their ministry (Luke 8:1-3). These women were present at the crucifixion (John 19:18-27) and waited at Jesus' tomb (Matt. 27:61, Mark 15:47, Luke 23:55-56). The initial, dramatic resurrection appearance was made to Mary Magdalene as she grieved for the missing body (John 20:1-18).[\[footnote\]](#)

Two gospels claim that Mary Magdalene was accompanied by other women. See Matt. 28:1-8 and Mark 16:1-8.

Although we read little of the adult interaction between Jesus and Mary, his mother, beyond her presence at the wedding when he changed water into wine (John 2:1-11) and his asking John to care for her after his death (John 19:25-27), no catalog of gospel references to women could omit her. The passages that describe the annunciation and the birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:18-2:23; Luke 1:26-56, 2:1-39) are among the most familiar in the Bible and

the oldest in the New Testament. Mary emerges as an innocent, compliant woman, reverent in her demeanor. When she felt the child move in her womb, she sang:

"My soul doth magnify the Lord," "And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior, For he bath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden:" "For, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. (Luke 1:46-48.)"

The references to her in Jesus' childhood conform with a traditional maternal ideal: she fulfilled religious obligations regarding him (Luke 2:21-38, 41-43), she fretted about his safety, and she noted carefully what he said and did (Luke 2:49-51). Early in his ministry she, along with his brothers, attempted to call him away from a crowd, but were rebuffed. "Who is my mother, or my brethern?" he asked, then answered himself, ". . . whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother and my sister, and mother" (Mark 3:33, 35). Later, she obviously joined the group of followers; she is listed with other women at the cross and waiting with them in Jerusalem after the ascension (Acts 1:14).

Specific teaching regarding women was scanty and their social inferiority was reflected, but they figured consistently and with some individuality throughout the life of Jesus of Nazareth as recorded in the gospels. Mary Daly points out that the "seeds of emancipation were present in the Christian message," but their full implications were not evident to those first-century authors.[\[footnote\]](#) Jesus' treatment of women raised questions, even if it did not supply definite answers; and, given the dedication of at least a group of women, some of those questions were bound to arise again in the church, the institution that grew out of his message and ministry. Daly, p. 80. Her "feminist postchristian introduction" to this 1975 edition asserts that no effort to reinterpret biblical texts, including her own, changes the overwhelmingly patriarchal character of the Bible.

Curiously, there were few textual references to Jesus and women in Texas Baptist sources from 1880 to 1900. Salvation was available through his sacrifice, life was lived for him, he was waiting in heaven for the faithful—belief in him was the core of religious faith—but examples from the gospels regarding his attitude toward the female sex per se were seldom advanced.

Several hypothesis partially explain this: 1) the writers were primarily men and they tended to use Genesis and Paul to support their stand on women and religion; 2) women's concept of themselves as a distinct group to whom Jesus might respond was undeveloped, so they did not seek a pattern for that response; and 3) the passages in which Jesus interacts with women were particular favorites of women, who wrote more prolifically in the twentieth century.

A long article written by a man in 1900 on "woman's sphere in the church" made only one reference to a text in the gospels. He claimed that Jesus had given woman a place in the church and that was "to see that He and His disciples were supported. . . . We do not find that men looked after the temporal needs of the Lord during His public ministry. They doubtless did, but it is put on record four different times that women did. Now, it is not out of the line of a woman's work to look after the necessities of the Lord's ministers." [\[footnote\]](#) While this extremely limited and traditional view of women's religious activity was not often repeated, neither was it refuted at the time, indicating that it was probably a safe, acceptable stance.

BS, November 8, 1900, p.3.

Just as unassailable were references to women in the life of Jesus as exemplary characters. Mary, the mother of Jesus, appeared in lists of Bible heroines, but with less frequency than one might expect. She was hailed as "the ideal woman" [\[footnote\]](#) and credited with interpreting the "innermost mind and heart of Christianity concerning woman," [\[footnote\]](#) but Baptists' resistance to what they considered to be the excesses of Roman Catholic Mariolatry checked exaggerated claims regarding her importance. In the Magnificat, claimed one minister, she did not single out herself alone as blessed but spoke "in the name of common womanhood." [\[footnote\]](#) The sisters, Mary and Martha, were the other women most frequently named as worthy New Testament females.

BS, October 15, 1914, p.3.

BS, June 8, 1916, p. 8.

Ibid.

With the clear success of women's missionary efforts (both their serving as such and organizing for support) and the recognition of women's rising

status in the twentieth century came credit to Jesus for effecting the change. He and women became legitimate partners and proof of the appropriateness of their relationship was sought in the New Testament. The Bible story of his taking the hand of a woman and lifting her from her sickbed was symbolic of the assistance he had given to all women.[\[footnote\]](#) "A slave she was," one observation ran, "and thus she groped her way in darkness until the voice of Him who spake as one having authority in one word broke the chains of her serfdom, rebuked the hypercritical disciples and commended the faithful services of Mary who anointed His body to the burying."

BS, October 15, 1914, p.3.

The incident of Jesus and the Samaritan woman speaking at the well illustrated that "Christianity gave the world a new definition of woman. The age-long conceptions of her station are thrown on the scrap-heaps of antiquity when Christ comes along. The rabbis taught: 'Do not prolong conversation with a woman; let no one converse with a woman in the street, not even with his own wife; let a man burn the words of the law, rather than teach them to women.' Woman was a slave until emancipated by Jesus."

[\[footnote\]](#) The "first Ladies Aid Society" was the group of women followers mentioned in Luke 8:1-3; "since the day when Mary and Martha received Him a welcome guest in their Bethany home and did obeisance to Him as Lord and Master, woman has had a large place in the service and Kingdom of our Redeemer."[\[footnote\]](#) "Last at the cross and first at the open sepulchre" became the phrase that captured the alliance between women and Jesus. Appropriately, a missionary summed up this spiritual conjunction: "It is the Christ of the Bible, it is his spirit entering humanity that has lifted woman. . . .[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, January 7, 1915, p. 8.

BS, July 2, 1914, p. 2.

BS, February 11, 1897, p.14.

The elevation of women was celebrated for the value it placed on her mind and her companionship, as well as her support and service. She was "the helpmate and the friend of man, not his toy or his slave."[\[footnote\]](#) Jesus "discovered woman as a companion and friend. He loved Mary and Martha as well as Lazarus. He did not regard woman as a toy and a flirt, whose

every thought turned to courtship and marriage, but looked upon her as the soul of sympathy and teachableness, and sought her as His disciple and friend." [\[footnote\]](#) One author even claimed that "Christ's teaching lifted from woman's shoulders the load of unnecessary household care," referring to Jesus' rebuke of Martha's serving; a raised moral consciousness would put housework in its proper (lower) perspective. [\[footnote\]](#) Clearly, the teaching and example of Jesus encouraged and justified women's intellectual advancement as the twentieth century progressed.

Ibid.

BS, June 8, 1916, p. 8

BS, December 28, 1911 p. 9

Jesus' statements regarding marriage were generally employed to enforce a legalistic strictness against divorce, with adultery the only possible "scriptural cause" for such action. Because the statement was phrased with reference to a "man putting away his wife," questions arose whether a woman had the same right if her husband had committed adultery. "Some say the law does not apply to both man and wife the same," admitted someone writing in the Baptist Standard in 1903, but "if God has given two laws I fail to find it." [\[footnote\]](#) In 1895, another writer said that in his "opinion" (a usage indicating controversy) a legally divorced woman would have the same privilege to remarry that a man would. [\[footnote\]](#) The use of Matthew 19 and Mark 10 was limited to rights to divorce and remarry, not to equality of personhood within marriage. A unique application of the man's leaving home and "cleaving unto his wife" was the advice of a problem-solver in 1902 that "more happiness results from the husband's going to live with the wife's people" than the reverse. [\[footnote\]](#)

BS, May 21, 1903, p. 3

BS, September 12, 1895, p. 1.

BS, June 12, 1902, p. 7.

The most radical aspect of the relationship of Jesus to woman lay in the doctrine of atonement, as understood in the Reformed tradition of Christianity. Baptists' belief in redemption, based on the sacrifice of Jesus and appropriated by faith, included the possibility of anyone's being saved regardless of sex, race, or other human condition. In that spiritual state of

grace, distinctions that ordinarily designated one as inferior or subordinate were transcended.

"Jesus is my Saviour./ He has washed me whiter than snow in his blood."

[\[footnote\]](#) This nineteenth-century woman's testimony affirmed with clarity and simplicity that she believed access to that salvation was hers. Very likely she thought the worth with which she had been endowed would finally be realized in another realm, after death, but that there were some intimations of glory in this life. In the early twentieth century, a minister waxed poetic, if not specific, about the earthly transformation possible for women under the Christian system: "Jesus died for woman as well as for man, and in the light of the cross she is invested with a new dignity and worth. She ceases to be a means and becomes an end. She ceases to be a toy and becomes a treasure. She ceases to be a slave and becomes a soul."

[\[footnote\]](#) Reasoning went even further: if woman was extended the benefits of atonement, and if some of those gifts were to be manifest upon her embracing the faith, then surely they would be operative in Jesus' spiritual body on earth, the church. This issue--translating the implications of the Christian gospel in a particular social setting--was central to the writers who composed the latter part of the New Testament. To

BS, June 28, 1894, p. 7.

BS, June 8, 1916, p. 8.

those books, primarily letters to young churches, Texas Baptists most often turned to learn how the "totally new relation established by the Lord between women and religion"[\[footnote\]](#) should be expressed.

BS, December 28, 1911, p. 9.

The literature of the early church

The efforts of the followers of Jesus to keep his ministry and message alive—led, they believed, by his spirit—created an institution whose only guide beyond the memory of his words and examples was Judaism. At first, they met in synagogues and in homes, sang from the Psalms, read from Jewish scripture, and accepted only other Jews as converts. But as this institution, the church, grew and added members who had not seen or heard Jesus, particularly those without Jewish backgrounds, theological and organizational problems arose. Leaders from among the later converts asserted themselves and challenged the power of the apostles who had been with Jesus. Stories of his life, an account of the church's beginning, letters that clarified doctrinal issues and gave practical advice, bulletins containing news of the organization and growth of churches in various places, notes of greeting and encouragement to fellow Christians, and visionary interpretations of kingdom theology were written, read, copied, and passed around. Some were ultimately accepted as authoritative by the church and, nearly 300 years after Jesus' death, were canonized as the scriptures of the Christian faith, the New Testament. These "books"—the Acts of the Apostles, which relates the activities of the church's first years, and the letters of Paul, Peter, and other known and unknown authors and interpreters of Christian dogma—composed the writings to which Baptists most often turned to discover God's will for Christian women.

Acts gives no instructions to women, but verifies that they were present in Jerusalem with the apostles and other followers of Jesus after his ascension (Acts 1:14). On the day of Pentecost when this group spoke in tongues, Peter claimed it was in fulfillment of the words of the prophet Joel: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18). Women were obviously a part of the band that lived together communally in the first Jerusalem church, since they are recorded as giving possessions (Acts 5:1-10), being baptized (Acts 5:14), complaining for having been treated unfairly in the daily distribution (Acts 6:1), and being imprisoned by a zealot named Saul

(Acts 8:3). The book of Acts also records the names of some women that appear in lists of biblical heroines: Tabitha, or Dorcas, who made clothing for the poor (Acts 9:36-41); Lydia, a Greek businesswoman who held prayer services (Acts 16:13-15); and Priscilla, a tentmaker who, along with her husband, gave further instruction to a young preacher (Acts 18:2-3, 24-26).

The epistles, or letters, also mention the names of individual women who "labored with [Paul] in the gospel" (Phil. 4:2-3). Timothy, one of the apostle Paul's co-ministers, is reminded of the faith that "dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice . . ." (II Tim. 1:5). A reference to Phebe (or Phoebe) in Romans 16:1-2

has been the center of controversy since the word the King James version translates "servant" was given as "deaconess" in some other translations. The passage reads: "I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also."

Paul, who as Saul had persecuted both women and men in the early days of the church, is the author of most of the direct New Testament instructions to women, and as such, continued in his persecutor role, according to many females. Most of his instructions to first-century women were consistent with his background and training as a Pharisaic Jew with a rabbinic education. In writing to the Corinthian church, newly established in a secular city, he was concerned about their image, their morals, and the disorder and confusion of their worship services. He offered this advice:

"But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the

woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. (I Cor. 11:3-9)"

To the same group he added: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church" (I Cor. 14:34-35).

Paul also offered advice both to married and single Christians in chapter 7 of the same epistle. These verses were shaped largely by his eschatological expectations, and he admitted he was rendering his judgment rather than divine command. The tenor of his advice was to refrain from marital responsibilities in order to devote full energy to the spiritual life. He recommended continence within marriage when that was feasible, but he did not suggest dissolving relationships that already existed. By remaining with an unbelieving spouse, one kept alive the possibility of saving that person (I Cor. 7:16). And he gave approval to sexual union within marriage for those with passions they could not contain, "for it is better to marry than to burn" (I Cor. 7:9).

Marriage was also the subject of discussion in the letter to the Ephesians, traditionally attributed to Paul, but considered by biblical scholars to be of disputed authorship. The context of this advice was a theological treatise on the nature of the relationship between Christ and the church; the alliance of husband and wife was presented as an analogy of that "great mystery." While hierarchical elements are present as in I Corinthians, more mutuality is inferred and the heat of eschatological fervor diminished.

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without

blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. (Eph. 5:22-28.)"

Paul reminded the church at Colossae that Jesus was served in all "callings," including marriage. His specific instructions were: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them" (Col. 3:18-19).

Passages in I Timothy and I Peter, thought to have been written later than the previous documents but in agreement with them, added restrictions regarding feminine dress to those related to marriage. Both brought the weight of Jewish tradition to bear on their subject:

"I will that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety. (I Tim. 2:9-15.)" "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands. . . . Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered. (I Peter 3:1-5, 7.)"

The case for women's rights based on the Pauline tradition established by the early church would seem (and may be) hopeless in the face of this formidable array of instruction. These were modified, however, by

instances of Paul's working with women and his mentioning their value to him. These were not examples of women's just having supported him or served his physical needs, but of women who "laboured with me in the gospel" (Phil. 4:3)—who taught others, took on missions of their own, even risked their lives to spread the Christian message. These individual women won his praise rather than his reprimand for having stepped beyond the bounds of feminine propriety. In women's favor, there was a side of Paul other than the one that reverted to Judaic tradition and sought to impose it in order to prevent scandal in struggling young churches. This was his visionary aspect, his religious genius, that synthesized the messianic hopes of Judaism and the message and person of Jesus into a theological system of sufficient plausibility and flexibility to persist for 2000 years. It was this voice that made the declaration that became the Magna Carta of Christian women:

"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:26-28.)"

Texas Baptists used references to the epistles far more often than other portions of the Bible to determine and to justify the proper sphere of women. The specific teaching on woman's general demeanor and on her place in the home and in the church made these writings a valuable ideological source. Their frequent use lends support to the assertion by one present-day author that "their effects remain in almost every form of social relationship."[\[footnote\]](#)
Harkness, p. 69.

Paul's advice on veils, the braiding of hair, and the wearing of gold and pearls had already been reduced by the late nineteenth century to a common-sense denominator: modesty. Occasionally a scrupulous person would inquire whether it was a sin for a Christian woman to wear gold, and the response was that the meaning of those admonitions was that apparel was not to be uppermost in a woman's mind and that excesses of adornment were to be shunned. A woman should be a "lady" and dress like one, summed up one writer.[\[footnote\]](#) No one insisted that "the apostle here

[intended] to forbid women's wearing modest, becoming ornaments."
[footnote] Veils, or their American equivalent, hats, were never mentioned beyond one reference in 1894 to woman's wearing "her sign of subjection." [footnote] Since this later became an issue in some conservative denominations and in Roman Catholicism, the subject was probably avoided because women still uniformly wore hats and bonnets in public throughout the period. In general, biblical injunctions regarding women's dress seem to have been re-interpreted to mean conforming to prevailing standards of modesty.

BS, February 24, 1916, p. 19.

BS, June 24, 1897, p. 7.

BS, November 15, 1894, p. 8. This might have referred to long hair rather than to a hat or veil.

The segments of scripture that elaborated on the relationship between husband and wife were the ones whose literal meaning was most widely accepted throughout the period of this study. Submission was emphasized more strongly in the nineteenth century and reciprocity was of growing concern in the twentieth, but the paternalistic family order of Genesis 2 and 3, repeated by Paul, Peter, and other New Testament writers, was never seriously challenged. The reference to "Adam [being] first formed, then Eve" (I Tim. 2:13) was "history, literal and simple, and not allegory," its credence enhanced by Jesus' and the apostles' reaffirmation. [footnote] "As the head of Christ is God, so the head of the man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man" is the way one Baptist succinctly summed up the argument in 1894. [footnote] At the turn of the century Reverend F. M. McConnell emphasized that the Corinthian correspondence restated that man was made first, then woman was made "for him." Man was the glory of God; woman was the glory of man. The Ephesians analogy of the relationship of Christ and the church as applied to that of husband and wife made clear the position of the two within marriage: man did the will of God; woman, the will of man. While the author did not address himself to the problem the system posed for single women, he did acknowledge that some men were not as worthy of being followed as was Jesus. "But," he asked, "shall we disregard a law of God because of the weakness of human nature?. . . If we disregard God's law on the subject are we sure we will get along any better by following an opposing law of our own making? Is it not

enough honor for man that he becomes the glory of God, and is it not enough honor for woman that she becomes the glory of man? Earth's highest duty is to perfect this Trinity." [\[footnote\]](#)

BS, June 12, 1902, p. 7.

BS, November 15, 1894, p. 8.

BS, November 1, 1900, p. 3.

By 1916, the firmness of this hierarchical arrangement had been moderated to an extent. Couples were still cautioned to build their homes "after the heavenly pattern," and the husband was reminded that his responsibility to honor his wife was as important as her duty to be in subjection. "This is not an unreasonable nor a hard requirement when a husband is not bitter against his wife and when he loves her as Christ loved the church," the author explained. [\[footnote\]](#) Another writer admitted that the subject was one he addressed with caution. But after making the point that husbands should be loving and kind, rather than domineering, he reminded women of the twentieth century that they "had better learn anew that God has placed men at the head of the family, indeed at the head of affairs in every department of life. When women rebel and try to change God's order, they are pulling the structure of their own safety and highest well-being down on their own heads." [\[footnote\]](#) Even the most moderate comment on the subject (made during the summer of 1916 when a woman's speaking at the SBC precipitated wide response) agreed that the husband was head of the wife in the marriage contract, yet from that "it [did] not follow that all men in the country are the head of all the women in the country." Nor did it follow that the woman had to marry if there was no man she could love and respect. "All that pushed to its logical end puts woman right back into the pit from which she was digged by the Savior. . . . Paul did not intend to obliterate individuality, personality, and choice in women." [\[footnote\]](#) The same author indicated in another article that wifely obedience was limited to the things that related to marriage, but that "wives [were] as free in religion as husbands." [\[footnote\]](#) In the same way that a Christian obeyed the law of the land unless it contradicted a higher law of God, a woman remained in submission to her husband unless her commitment to God was infringed upon. This did leave some margin for self-judgment on the wife's part, but it did not basically deny the notion that God's plan for family order from time immemorial was patriarchy.

BS, March 30, 1916, p. 6.

BS, February 24, 1916, p. 19.

BS, July 13, 1916, pp. 10-11.

BS, August 10, 1916, p. 11.

If the biblical ideal for woman's place in the home was most agreed upon, the plan for her role in the church was most problematic. Far more space and attention was given to this in denominational newspapers than to any other woman-centered issue.[\[footnote\]](#) In particular, the passages that advised women to "keep silence in the churches" and not to "usurp authority" over a man were interpreted and reinterpreted over the 40-year span of this study. Some Baptists maintained the most rigid, conservative position in every decade, and others opted for a freer translation in the nineteenth century, but a general pattern of change can be detected. A gradual opening of the door of participation in church activities and worship evolved. Once a compromise with complete silence was made, however, controversy ensued over each increment of change.

Women's organizational efforts and reports took more space, but they were not a biblical issue to be understood and resolved.

References to the "silence" issue proliferated in the 1890s when some women began asserting themselves in ways they felt they could justify and others wanted to condemn. Questions were raised as to whether women could make or second motions, pray, or speak in church meetings, and they were often met with a literal reading of Paul:

"It seems to me that it is not a question as to whether God commands Christian women to refrain from speaking in the churches, but the real question is as to whether these daughters of the Lord are willing to obey the command of their Father.[\[footnote\]](#)" "No language can be plainer or more explicit. No candid mind can mistake its meaning.[\[footnote\]](#)" "Paul says again: Let the women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak. We cannot mistake the meaning of this scripture. . . . Are you such bigots that you will practice those things forbidden by God's word, as if you had power to originate the Bible? Or, will you act as if you had received the word as your only standard of appeal, instead of sending out your own ideas as the standard.[\[footnote\]](#)" "The Word of God expressly

commands women to keep silence in the churches. That they think they might do good sometimes by speaking publicly in the church, does not excuse them for violating Christ's command.[\[footnote\]](#)" "I differ from those of our sex who affirm that Paul, the inspired man of God, was an enemy, or that their restrictions applies [sic] to some local trouble. This has been explained away, but my dear sisters, we are Baptists and the word of God should be the end of all controversy with us. This we shall do by the grace of God.[\[footnote\]](#)"

BS, February 18, 1897, p. 3.

BS, December 19, 1895, n.p.

BS, November 15, 1894, p. 8.

BS, January 7, 1897, p. 1.

BS, October 19, 1893, p. 3.

The most narrow view suggested that women could only pray silently without offending the dictum of I Corinthians,[\[footnote\]](#) but another pointed out that by that standard "every Baptist church in Christendom" had already erred by allowing women to sing.[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, December 19, 1895, n.p.

BS, January 21, 1897, p. 5.

A woman who sang was certainly not silent, but this was rationalized on the basis that woman's singing had biblical precedents and that in so doing she was "neither teaching, save incidentally, nor usurping authority, nor... joining in the debates that necessarily arise in the transaction of church business."[\[footnote\]](#) The other imperative that broke the silence barrier was the necessity of a woman's testifying to her own conversion experience when she joined the church, "a universal custom among Baptists," and if she "has a hope in Christ she should ever be ready to give a reason therefor, and this carries with it the right to tell her experience more than once."[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, February 20, 1896, p. 3.

BS, January 21, 1897, p. 5.

Evidently the knowledge that Baptist custom had already admitted that Paul meant something other than absolute silence and the fact that women did not rush into unrespectable authoritative roles altered the terms of

argumentation by the turn of the century. The Corinthian passages were put in their cultural context of confusion and disorder, an unusual situation that called for an extreme remedy. The "misinterpreted" apostle had "allowed those same women to pray and prophesy, provided they had due regard to distinctions of sex," readers were reminded.^[footnote] Instances of Paul's working with women and the example of women's exercising spiritual gifts on the day of Pentecost were used frequently as illustrations of the fact that women had an active, biblically approved role in the church. There was general agreement that women had a sphere, even obligations, but, aside from a prohibition against preaching, no firm limitations were set. In the free-church tradition, each church decided its own version of orthodoxy. One such congregation wrote in 1903 that they had "women as Sunday-school teachers and our choirs are principally made up of women. Women are sent as messengers to associations, placed on committees to solicit funds for pastor's salary and other purposes. They publicly relate their Christian experiences, give testimony, lead in public prayer, second motions and vote in our conferences. All this is legitimate. Paul did not mean to prohibit any of the work above mentioned."^[footnote] These were the kinds of activities pursued by women in most churches, with the greatest controversy centering around a woman's speaking aloud in a "mixed assembly," i.e., one composed of men and women. In order to obey the injunction against "usurping authority," many women restricted their teaching to other women and children. The Bible was used to support a wider role for females, but in general that role was exercised by virtue of the permission and good will of males, who held the reins of power.

BS, May 29, 1902, p. 3.

BS, October 22, 1903, p. 3.

By the second decade of the twentieth century, interpretation of the issue had changed emphasis from the restrictive passages to the permissive ones. Questions were still raised about the verses urging silence, but they were answered matter-of-factly in terms of local customs in New Testament times. A typical response was that Paul was discussing "an orderly church service," and he demanded not "the silence of dumbness," but "the silence of quiet behavior."^[footnote] A repressive question like one asked in 1916, "Has a woman any right to vote on a pastor?" drew the response, "What a

question: Read Gal. 3:28 and see whether there be any distinction of sex in the faith that is in Christ Jesus." [\[footnote\]](#)

BS, October 30, 1913, p. 18.

BS, April 27, 1916, p. 24.

A comprehensive article written by James Gambrell in 1916 confessed that the "current of Scripture teaching" on women had been altered; namely, it had moved from "a few passages given in negative form" to affirmative doctrine. He used examples of women prophesying in Acts and in the letters of Paul and argued that if Paul gave instructions regarding how women were to pray and prophesy, he was sanctioning those activities. He distinguished between Paul's dealing with "customs and proprieties," which change, and "fundamental principles," which are eternal. The principles behind Paul's instructions to women were 1) "to dress and behave becomingly, so as to bring no reproach on our calling," and 2) to honor "the headship of the man in the marriage relation." Beyond that, Gambrell stressed "the inherent right of every one to think and act in religion on the basis of personal responsibility." Citing the Samaritan woman at the well giving her testimony "in the presence of the Savior and recorded by the pen of inspiration," he affirmed the "truth and consistency of Scripture" in granting the "liberty of the spirit" to both sexes. [\[footnote\]](#)

BS, August 10, 1916, pp. 10-11.

Mention of women speaking on the day of Pentecost was made numerous times to give biblical credence to women having an active--even vocal--role in church affairs, but the passage in Galatians that obliterated all reference to sex among those who were "one in Christ Jesus" offered the greatest hope of real comradeship in service. A minister insisted that Paul was "sounding out clearly the equal rights of women." [\[footnote\]](#) "A woman is just as worthy and precious in the sight of God as a man, and all distinctions which imply inferiority and degradation, in Him, are broken down."

[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, July 8, 1915, p. 25.

BS, June 8, 1916, p. 8.

Between the 1880s and the 1910s Baptists made an intellectual journey in which they moved from an emphasis on "submission" passages to ones

supporting "freedom." This movement helped rationalize the cultural changes that enlarged women's role in the church while allowing them to remain under the ideological umbrella of a biblical faith. The change was not unilateral, but the majority of the denomination moved with the tide of those times or made the journey subsequently. The "freedom" that was espoused and practiced, however, was compromised in two respects: the maintenance of the creation hierarchy in family relations and the prohibition of a woman's preaching or being ordained to the ministry. On these two points, orthodoxy was not challenged. Some of the reasons for the acceptance of these limitations were women's lack of imagination and courage, their unshakable faith in the system that had traditionally upheld these areas of male supremacy, and the refusal of men to surrender their bastions of power. Predictably, these are precisely the issues that the present-day feminist struggle, insofar as it exists within the Baptist church, is reinterpreting and attempting to change.

The irony involved in holding fast to a single guide for truth while altering the interpretation of that body of material should strike a familiar chord in this nation, where we use the Constitution in much the same manner. Rather than the practice discrediting the ideological source, one could claim that such flexibility and scope insures its continuity through changing cultures and times. Biblical literalists are reluctant to admit that the New Testament contains contradictions or that the nature of truth found there is pluralistic, but even the strictest of sects emphasizes one set of doctrines over another. One honest Baptist minister who wrote in 1892 that Baptists' interpretation of scripture regarding women would change, just as it had changed on missions in the early nineteenth century, concluded that while "men are jealous of an attack upon their opinions about the Bible" and "are loth to admit [they] are wrong, . . . 'The sun do move.'"[\[footnote\]](#)
BS, June 9, 1892, p. 3.

A model for the pattern whereby biblicists accept cultural change without relinquishing their faith includes three stages: first, forces of change are introduced by society, inciting reinforcement and wide support for the traditional view; second, innovation grows and finds biblical support, forcing orthodoxy into a struggle; third, change and its textual justification become the new orthodoxy, leaving the traditional view to dissipate or to

eventually reassert itself over unresolved aspects of the issue. For the transformation to occur peacefully, without splintering the group (as it did in this phase of Christian women's liberation), enough time must elapse to allow for a replacement of the leadership that strongly asserted the status quo position; change must occur gradually and circumspectly, behind the society at large; and there should be an important goal (e.g., missions and their support) facilitated by the shift. Those who, by habit, personality, and/or conviction, are committed to an ideology are careful to demonstrate that innovation does not alter the source of truth, but comes by better interpretation and greater understanding on the part of the believer. The stabilizing force--in this case, the authority of the literal Bible--with which the religious person identifies in order to overcome the unsettling and erosive effects of an uncertain world must remain authoritative and unchanged.[\[footnote\]](#)

Richard Quebedeaux, *The Worldly Evangelicals* (San Francisco:Harper and Row, 1978), p. 11.

During the period of change covered by this study, dedication to biblical authority did not waver. "No single word in the Bible is there without a definite purpose. Each story there told is intended as a lesson," reminded a woman speaking to the women mission workers' convention in 1901.

[\[footnote\]](#) Approach to Bible study was thorough and uncritical, given to outlining chapters, learning characters and places, memorizing verses, etc. Aids like "Hill's 1200 Bible Questions" and "Beauchamp's Outlines" gave structure to classes.[\[footnote\]](#) Minutes of women's meetings invariably included mention of a scripture reading. Rather than extracting doctrinal discourses from such passages, however, women used them as "watchwords" or "slogans" in support of a generalized pietism. A meeting whose theme was "If the Bible were destroyed and I could save one verse, which one would it be?" met with enthusiastic response.[\[footnote\]](#) Favorite chapters and verses were cited as giving comfort to women during illness and on deathbeds. Queries in "Questions Answered" columns from women, asking for the correct meaning of a passage, indicated they studied the Bible seriously even though they did not respond to doctrinal debates or write exegetical articles and speeches. An exception, Mrs. George W. Truett, wrote the weekly Sunday-school lesson in the Baptist Standard early in the

twentieth century, but she was "too modest to allow her name to appear."[\[footnote\]](#)

Proceedings of the BWMW of Texas, 1901, p. 168.

BS, July 6, 1916, p. 12.

Proceedings of the BWMW of Texas, 1901, p. 178.

BS, April 3, 1902, p. 4.

The Woman's Bible, which was published in 1895 and 1898 by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, was never mentioned by a woman writer, but drew a number of editorial comments in the Standard. Predictably, the editor viewed Mrs. Stanton as an "atheistic woman" and her efforts to answer those portions of the Bible that denigrate women as "attempts to repeal the inspired Word of God." He expected it to cause a "revulsion of sentiment" that would restore the values of Christianity and motherhood Mrs. Stanton sought to destroy. [\[footnote\]](#) "Higher criticism," the application of scholarly historical method to biblical texts that was embraced by many theologians in the 1890s, naturally met with the same overwhelming disapproval. Its inroads into Baptist circles remained as distant as the University of Chicago and Southern Theological Seminary of Louisville, Kentucky,[\[footnote\]](#) but it was denounced as "a dirty little theory into which the [critic] proposes to stuff the Bible; and what he cannot force in, he rejects."[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, October 10, 1895, p. 1.

Controversy over "higher criticism" in Baptist circles in the 1890s centered around the writing and teaching of W. H. Whitsitt, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., and W. R. Harper, president of the University of Chicago.

BS, January 30, 1902, p. 2.

The motivations and experiences that wed Texas Baptists to biblical authority were as various as religious response—a complex entity—is in any group. Some sought a blueprint by which to order their lives; others grasped for the security of heavenly promises. For some, the Bible made sense of the human experience, while others took it for granted as an unquestioned part of their cultural heritage. Still others were no doubt convinced of its truth by their emotional response to a worship service or a personal plea. Whatever the cause, the resulting commitment sometimes took the form of smugness and self-righteousness of the sort true believers

manifest. It is something of a relief to discover bits of evidence of some "whistling in the dark" amidst the Baptist claims of absolute confidence in the biblical record and in their ability to decipher its meaning. One such poignant note was found in the diary of an old minister, living out his final days with his missionary daughter in Brazil. "One of the delights of heaven," he wrote, will be a "perfect revelation of the Bible."[\[footnote\]](#)
John Hill Luther, TS of Diary, entry dated January 26, 1903, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas (original at Mary Hardin-Baylor College, Belton, Texas).

Conclusions

Although Texas Baptist women continued to affirm their acceptance of the Bible as an authoritative source for role definition throughout the period from 1880 to 1920, their interpretation of the biblical message shifted its focus during that time. Passages that stressed restriction and submission were gradually de-emphasized and those that promoted freedom and participation were brought forward. Interpretative methods that centered on specific legalities gave way to a search for general principles; there was less emphasis on complexities of doctrine and more on illustrations of piety. The insinuation of secular social thought justified the movement toward egalitarianism and the pragmatic inclusion of women to achieve denominational goals. Despite clear movement in the direction of woman's emancipation, however, limits to her power were clearly imposed in the family and in church leadership. The following chapters will address the ways in which these ideas, their modifications, and their limitations were expressed in the character and activities of specific women.

Sending the Light: The Organizing of Texas Baptist Women

Establishment of missionary Baptists in Texas.

During the period of exploration and settlement of Texas by both the Spaniards and the Mexicans, Roman Catholicism was the only religion whose establishment was permitted by the state. In fact, the permanent outposts developed by the Spaniards during their occupation of the territory from the 1680s to 1820 were primarily missions, founded by priests and devoted to evangelizing the indigenous Indian population. Not accidentally, these missions were located along or near the Mexican border and along the territorial boundary between Texas and French-owned Louisiana and served a military as well as religious function. Soldier and priest, mission and fort often existed side by side, sharing common facilities.

Because the Indians did not adopt Christianity in large numbers and few Spanish citizens colonized the area, religious activity in the missions waned as the eighteenth century progressed. The military aspect of the settlements took on more and more importance, however, as encroachment from the east threatened, heightened by the United States' purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803. Official loyalty to the Catholic faith, however, did not diminish. When Mexico took possession of Texas from Spain in 1821, she adopted a similar policy of church/state co-existence. Not only did her constitution protect and support Catholicism, it forbade the exercise of any other religion.[\[footnote\]](#)

Ethel Z. Rather, "De Witt's Colony," *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association*, VIII, 2 (October, 1904), pp. 101, 173-75.

Since this was the prevailing law under which the first Baptists settled in the territory, their story can be described as, initially, one of civil disobedience. Stephen F. Austin and the other "impresarios" who contracted with Mexico to bring colonists into Texas agreed explicitly that the homeseekers under their grants would become Roman Catholics, and the government of Mexico implied that once churches were built, priests would be supplied to the new communities to administer spiritual rites and counsel.[\[footnote\]](#) That neither party conformed to this agreement understates the case. When the Mexicans sought to stem the tide of

immigration in 1830, the secretary of state used the fact that "not one among them, in Texas,... is a Catholic" to make his point.[\[footnote\]](#) He exaggerated, but it was true that a negligible minority of the approximately 15,000 colonists who entered Texas during the decade of 1820-30 adhered to the religious qualifications of settlement. Anti-Catholic brushfires burst out in scattered communities, but indifference to religion was the primary form of resistance. The brutality and isolation of pioneer existence and the lack of spiritual leadership kept Protestant reaction from forming and gathering momentum. On the other hand, Mexico did little to proselytize the newcomers. The limited number of priests were unable to provide even a minimal level of pastoral care, leaving marriages and deaths unmarked by official ceremony for months or years.

J. M. Carroll, *A History of Texas Baptists* (Dallas: Baptist Standard Publishing Co., 1923), P. 9.

Edna Rowe, "The Disturbances at Anahuac in 1832," *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association*, VI, 4 (April, 1903), p. 267.

Baptist activity during the colonial period consisted mainly of scattered preaching services, reportedly held as early as 1822 by Joseph Bays near the Sabine River and by Freeman Smalley near the Red River. A school teacher, Thomas J. Pilgrim, began a Sunday school in 1829 in Austin's colony at San Felipe, but it was suppressed after a few meetings. Tradition has it that in 1833 Massie Millard and other women in the Nacogdoches community met to pray for their safety against Indian raiders on what eventually became the site of a Baptist church. Daniel Parker was pastor of a small Illinois Baptist church that moved to Texas in 1834, reorganized, and met at several locations in East Texas for over thirty years.[\[footnote\]](#) This group, the "Pilgrim Church of Predestinarian Regular Baptists," was of the non-missionary, "hard-shell" persuasion and participated in no cooperative religious societies beyond the congregational level.

J. B. Link, *Texas Historical and Biographical Magazine* (Austin, Texas, 1891-92), II, 671-72. This small, mobile church was extremely influential and left its doctrinal and organizational mark on the Baptist churches of east Texas. The best reference on the history of the non-cooperating Baptist churches is J. S. Newman, *A History of the Primitive Baptists of Texas, Oklahoma and Indian Territories* (Tioga: Baptist Trumpet, 1906).

Texas independence and the formation of the republic in 1836 led to a removal of restrictions on Protestant affiliation and exercises, but the unsettled circumstances of daily life continued to restrain church growth. Tensions with Indians and boundary disputes with Mexico resulted in skirmishes for another decade. The fledgling government and economy were unstable, the population was scattered and mobile, and roads were poor to nonexistent. The foundation of Baptist state activities was laid, however, in early-settled Washington County, where the first missionary Baptist church was organized at Washington-on-the-Brazos in 1837. Z. N. Morrell, its minister, led the group in appealing to the American Baptist home and foreign mission boards for assistance. These requests, repeated to the Southern Baptist Convention after it formed in 1845, brought some funds and, more important, two seminary-trained missionaries, James A. Huckins and William M. Tryon, who eventually worked with churches in Galveston and Houston.

In his remembrances published in 1872, Morrell wrote vividly of a revival that occurred at the Washington church in 1841. Judge R. E. B. Baylor, holding court in Washington under the jurisdiction of the Republic, was the speaker and won forty-two converts. Almost nightly the congregation would proceed in the moonlight, "singing the songs of Zion," to the banks of the Brazos, where the baptisms were performed. Morrell reported that the "beauty and sublimity," of these scenes brought visitors from twenty-five miles away.[\[footnote\]](#) Among the other oldest Baptist churches in Texas were those formed at Nacogdoches in 1838, Plum Grove (Bastrop) in 1839, and Independence in 1839.

Z. N. Morrell, *Flowers and Fruits in the Wilderness*, 3rd ed. (St. Louis: Commercial Printing Co., 1882), p. 149.

The first steps toward church organization above the level of the individual congregation appear to have been taken by the church of Independence, Texas, in 1840 when it formed an "association" with two other churches to promote evangelical, educational, and benevolent causes. In an effort to harmonize the variety of Baptist styles brought to Texas from other states, they adopted the name "Union Baptist Association."[\[footnote\]](#) This supra-church group faced dissension and indifference, but its missionary and educational goals, in particular, justified its existence. Union Baptist

Association succeeded in appointing a Home Mission Society that supported several ministers, including Morrell, and a Texas Baptist Education Society that founded Baylor University in 1845. William Tryon took the initiative in the latter and was possessed with the vision of a Baptist university that would "secure permanence to our denomination" and form a "nucleus around which the denomination would rally";[\[footnote\]](#) but when presented with the charter for the university he filled in the name of another Education Society member, Judge Baylor.[\[footnote\]](#) The university opened in Independence with twenty-five students, both male and female, and progressed slowly until a stone building was completed for the male students in 1851.[\[footnote\]](#)

Ibid., p. 144.

Southern Baptist Missionary Journal, II, 4 (September, 1847), pp. 98-100, as cited in Robert A. Baker, *The Blossoming Desert* (Waco: Word Books, Publ., 1970), p. 84.

Link, I, 150.

Because of the concentration of population, other denominations also chartered schools in the same vicinity: the Methodists at Chappell Hill, the Presbyterians at Gay Hill, and the Episcopalians at Anderson.

The dissolution of the Republic of Texas and the adoption of statehood in 1845 did not immediately end the conflicts with Mexicans and Indians, but it did bring thousands of immigrants westward and, since the state was allowed to keep its public land, provided for economic stability. The total population, estimated at 35,000 in 1836, jumped to 142,000 in 1847, 213,000 in 1850, and over 613,000 in 1860.[\[footnote\]](#)

Baker, p. 92-3.

The Baptists grew and prospered along with the state. Acting from its position as the "mother association," Union Baptist Association sought a wider organizational base and called for the formation of a statewide group, or "convention," to be gathered at Anderson in 1848. At that time, Morrell estimated there were seventy-five Baptist churches in the state, composed of over 2,000 members.[\[footnote\]](#) The churches that answered the call were primarily from the southern and southeastern portions of Texas. Determined "by conference and cooperation [to] sweep over the whole State, . . . following close on the heels of the Indian and buffalo,"[\[footnote\]](#) they

formed the Baptist State Convention, carefully checking their own power with a constitutional disclaimer to any authority over church or association. Morrell, p. 305.
Ibid., p. 291.

For a variety of reasons Texas Baptists chafed under even this loose ecclesiastical organization. One factor was the disparity of church polity and tradition in the states from which they had immigrated. These differences were further exaggerated by an individualistic style that motivated them to pull up roots and strike out for new land. In addition, the distances encompassed by Texas and poor transportation and communication facilities obstructed goals of denominational cohesion and concerted activity. Therefore, while the Convention acted consistently with a doctrine of local autonomy and limited its power to voluntary participation by individuals (not delegates) from churches and missionary societies, it discovered that many Baptists in the state were disposed to think solely in terms of the local church. Any statewide organization met with suspicion and often opposition.

The number of churches participating in annual meetings prior to 1860 varied from fourteen to forty, and they struggled with confusion over the authority of the Board of Directors of the Baptist State Convention to collect and disburse funds. Predictably, by 1853, churches in the eastern and northeastern portions of the state, claiming they had been neglected in the assignment of missionaries and desiring to establish a school in Tyler, organized a rival state body, the Texas Baptist General Association. (This group adopted the name Baptist Convention of Eastern Texas in 1853, then reverted to the original designation in 1868.) The work of the original Baptist State Convention was further thwarted throughout the 1850s by a quarrel between Rufus Burleson, president of Baylor University and head of the male department, and Horace Clark, principal of the female section. A lack of clarity over their areas of jurisdiction and a "disgraceful" clash of personalities led ultimately to Burleson's resignation and removal to Waco University in 1861.[\[footnote\]](#)

L. R. Elliott, ed., Centennial Story of Texas Baptists (Chicago: Hammond Press, 1936), p. 146.

The vision, the organizational structure, and even a sufficient number of church members to support cooperative effort were present among Texas Baptists prior to 1860, but they lacked experience with confederation and they were not yet motivated to achieve large, unified goals. Constantly gnawing at any organizational effort was their traditional opposition to an ecclesiastical body invested with power of its own. Each generation produced a different focus for its resistance, but strong antagonism to a religious bureaucracy persisted throughout the nineteenth century. The kind of affiliation that came to be widely accepted before the Civil War was that of a few churches joined in a single association to assure the success of a specific, local project. A typical example was the proliferation of small schools, often for girls and seldom larger than one teacher in one room, established by Baptists in nearly every populated area of the state. Meanwhile, the individual evangelistic enterprise Baptists historically favored won increasing numbers of converts, the most famous of whom was Sam Houston, baptized at Independence in 1854.

All religious work was either halted or severely disrupted between 1860 and 1874 by the Civil War and Reconstruction. J. M. Carroll, a Baptist historian who experienced the upheaval, recalled that those events

"created absolutely new conditions in Texas, and virtually made a new civilization. . . . The magnitude of the State and the absence of transportation facilities rendered it difficult for the people to meet. They could not possibly know and feel and act sympathetically and harmoniously. Almost every separate community, religious and otherwise, had to think and act for itself. [\[footnote\]](#)"

Carroll, p. 422.

Among the rare advances made by Baptists in this period were the founding of several German-speaking churches, the beginning of an indigenous newspaper, the Texas Baptist Herald, by J. B. Link, and the origin in 1868 of one of the most significant churches in the state, First Baptist of Dallas, with eleven members. Negro Baptists, who had generally worshipped with whites prior to the War, began several churches on their own and inspired some missionary interest on the part of white brethren, but they were

encouraged to form their own cooperative societies instead of joining those already established by whites.

Following the depression and isolation of wartime and the erratic restructuring of society and government that ensued, Baptists reacted to the relative stability and prosperity of the late 1870s with a transitional mixture of unification and dispersion. There was a frenzy of organizing, but it was uncoordinated and repetitious. The protection of local interests, rather than evangelical outreach, was often the goal of the "wheels within wheels" that were manufactured and set turning, yet often failed to mesh and prove effective. Carroll characterized the spirit of the times as "centrifugal" and cooperation within the denomination as spasmodic and based on individual whim or sectional bias. In his analysis, the changed conditions signaled growth, but

"[s]o rapid was the growth that our people became restless and hurried. They wanted to grow faster. They became impatient with the tardiness and seeming inefficiency of all the old general organizations, and it seemed to them that the quickest remedy was to have new and more numerous organizations.[\[footnote\]](#)"
Ibid., p. 515.

The two existing state cooperative bodies, the State Convention and the General Association, regrouped and tried to enlist support for their programs, but their appeals were weakened by three new groups organized to serve the needs of east, central, and north Texas. In addition, two Sunday school conventions, two ministerial conferences, a deacons' convention, two statewide women's organizations, twenty-nine district associations, and another newspaper, The Texas Baptist, published in Dallas by S. A. Hayden, were formed.

This organizing fervor, however, did not generate much revenue for state missions nor for the struggling Baptist state schools. The impetus for the two largest state conventions to rekindle their interest in missions came from the Home Mission Board of the southwide Baptist cooperative body, the Southern Baptist Convention (hereafter, abbreviated SBC), and a wing of the northern Baptist organization, the Home Mission Society of New York, both of whom proposed matching-fund arrangements with the Texas

groups. By the mid-1880s the State Convention and the General Association were supporting numerous missionaries in conjunction with those bodies, although there was controversy over the involvement of a northern Baptist society in the project.

The schools did not fare as well. After President Burleson and a group of graduating seniors left Baylor in 1861 for Waco University, the jurisdiction of the male and female departments of Baylor was formally divided. The female segment, which became known as Baylor College, continued to progress slowly, although it had always been a step-sister to the male department. The male school, Baylor University, carried on for nearly twenty-five more years, but with each year the dream that it would be the great central Baptist university dimmed. The loyalties of the Texas Baptist General Association gradually formed around Waco University, while the Baptist State Convention struggled vainly to keep both Bayers solvent. Finally, it was neither rivalry nor debt that ended the Baylor/ Independence chapter of Baptist history, but the fact that the railroads and main roads bypassed the town. A cyclone that damaged several university buildings in 1882 and the death of the president, William Carey Crane, in 1885 brought that forty-year phase of that Baptist educational enterprise to a close.

The early- to mid-1880s were watershed years for other aspects of Texas Baptist life. Many of those who had led the denomination through its formative stages had died, and new leaders of broader vision and less sectional prejudice came to the front. Improved communication and transportation enlarged horizons and emphasized the ineffectiveness of rivalry and duplication in achieving religious goals.[\[footnote\]](#) Annual meetings of the SBC held in Jefferson in 1874 and in Waco in 1883 put the southern spotlight on Texas as a strong factor in the denomination's future. The volunteering of the first Texans to the foreign mission field, E. H. Quillen and W. B. and Anne Luther Bagby, as well as the founding of Buckner Orphan Home in Dallas, gave Baptists all over the state goals commensurate with their desire to forego pettiness and close ranks. At least one Baptist historian, Robert A. Baker, recognized these directions as part of a national trend toward "unification into an orderly system." See Baker, p. 148.

The result of these societal shifts was a unification of Texas Baptist forces. It was first proposed by the General Association to the State Convention in 1883, but the Convention did not respond positively until 1885, when consolidation offered a solution to their problems with the two Bayers at Independence. Because there had been several years of deliberation and "spadework," the committees from these principal state bodies moved rapidly to join their efforts; however, J. M. Carroll, again an eyewitness, reported that negotiations did not always go smoothly: "Few, if any secured all they wanted, and some secured probably nothing as they really wanted it."[\[footnote\]](#)

Carroll, p. 648.

In the "Christian compromise" that was effected, the five state organizations disbanded and formed a single body named "The Baptist General Convention of Texas." This state body was subdivided into smaller geographical units called "associations." Besides promoting statewide missions, the Baptist General Convention of Texas accepted responsibility for the denomination's other cooperative efforts--colleges, Sunday schools, and women's groups. Baylor University and Waco University were united at Waco as a coeducational institution under the Baylor name, and Baylor Female College was moved to Belton. The Sunday school conventions had already consolidated in 1885, and the women's groups came together as Baptist Women Mission Workers. Because the papers were privately owned and distinctly rivals, negotiations on their future were handled separately and not completed as successfully as those pertaining to the conventions and schools. Hayden ultimately purchased Link's paper and retained Link briefly as co-editor of the Texas Baptist and Herald, located in Dallas.

In a Baylor thesis completed in 1930, Oscar T. Smith stated that the greatest social adjustment made by Baptists in Texas was that of emphasizing cooperation rather than individualism, making "an internal adaptation to meet an external social situation."[\[footnote\]](#) The external situation that these late-nineteenth-century Baptists confronted was the complex economic order and subsequent ordering of society that was based on a national transportation and communication network and was characterized by specialization and bureaucratic organization. Entering that mainstream meant altering conceptions of individualism and autonomy that were the

backbone of Baptist tradition. The transformation could not have been made without an outstanding group of leaders placing their weight and influence in the direction of the cultural thrust, structuring the denomination's institutions to serve new functions, and proposing goals worthy of change. Even with these difficult conditions met, the fledgling Baptist General Convention of Texas (hereafter, abbreviated BGCT) faced constant controversy in its first fifteen years of existence.

Oscar T. Smith, "Texas Baptists and Social Adjustments," Thesis Baylor University 1930, p. 20.

Some of these controversies originated in the wider world of Southern Baptists and touched Texas only peripherally; for instance, when the threat of modern biblical scholarship caused a disruption at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and resulted in the resignation of President W. H. Whitsett in 1898, leading Texas Baptists supported his departure.[\[footnote\]](#) State religious newspapers also disparaged the appearance of "higher criticism" at the University of Chicago, condoned by its Baptist president, W. R. Harper, but the taint of that "literary rehash from German cook shops"[\[footnote\]](#) did not spread to the faculties of Texas Baptist schools. Their commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture as the bedrock of Baptist faith remained a constant in a world of increasing inconstancy. The Bible was reinterpreted and new emphases made, but the truthfulness of its literal interpretation was not questioned. Although Whitsett confirmed his own belief in the biblical correctness of baptism by immersion, his scholarship led him to question the historical continuity of Baptists' practice of that mode of baptism, a heretical notion to those committed to the purity and uniformity of Baptist doctrine from apostolic times, specifically "Landmark" Baptist followers of J. R. Graves. They supported the position that New Testament authority had been perpetuated with historical continuity through local congregations rather than bishops. See John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972), pp. 18-19, 74-76. Baptist Standard (Waco), December 13, 1894, p. 1. Hereinafter in these notes this publication will be referred to as "BS." The place of publication from inception until February 3, 1898, was Waco, Texas; from that date it was published in Dallas, Texas.

Disagreement did occur in Texas, however, over interpretation of Scripture—such arguments were standard in the free-church tradition—but because of their widened range of interaction and attempts to work in concert, Baptists had to come to a resolution on such issues. Cooperation, therefore, necessitated greater uniformity of doctrine and concrete ways for dealing with variants and detractors. Two examples of such controversies took place in the early 1890s over the unorthodox teachings of M. T. Martin on "absolute assurance" and George M. Fortune on the doctrine of atonement. They so threatened the tenuous unity of state churches that the men ultimately met with disciplinary action by local churches and condemnation in the convention.[\[footnote\]](#) Originating outside Texas, but also potentially disruptive to Texas Baptist cooperative societies, was the agitation reintroduced in the SBC by T. P. Crawford, a missionary to China who denied the biblical authority for supporting missionaries through cooperative boards instead of sending money directly from local churches. No convention action was taken in Texas in this case, but the credibility of the Foreign Mission Board of SBC (and of its state equivalents) was seriously questioned by many churches and funds withheld. Proceedings of the BGCT, 1895, p. 8.

The greatest clash—in fact, "the most virulent of all the quarrels Texas Baptists have ever known"[\[footnote\]](#)—was another based on the tension between the authority of local churches versus cooperative agencies, but in this case the integrity of officials of the state missionary board was disputed, as well as their right to act. S. A. Hayden, editor of the Texas Baptist and Herald, instigated the action against the executive board of the BGCT throughout the 1890s, but his most vicious attacks were reserved for J. B. Cranfill, corresponding secretary for missions from 1889 to 1892, and, beginning in 1892, editor of the Texas Baptist Standard. Hayden began by questioning Cranfill's use of missionary funds, but his accusations escalated until he envisioned the relationship between the board and its constituent churches in terms of a conspiracy, a struggle between "centralization and church autonomy, between the masses and the classes, between the Baptists many and bosses few, between economy and extravagance, between missionaries and visionaries."[\[footnote\]](#) Hayden capitalized on the ancient Baptist fear of centralized authority to promote his own interest in power. Baker, p. 157.

Proceedings of the BGCT, 1898, p. 11.

In dealing with Hayden's assault on the convention, including an attempt to seat his own group as the authoritative body, the BGCT was forced to define its authority. That definition stated that the state convention was not composed of churches, but of messengers from churches, associations, and missionary societies who had no delegated power from those bodies.

[\[footnote\]](#) In refusing to seat a delegate (as was the case with Hayden in 1897), therefore, the convention responded only to that individual and did not repudiate the sovereignty of the church that selected him as a messenger. Because the messenger acts solely as an individual and has no power to act on a church's behalf, the state convention holds no direct or explicit power over the local church. Those churches may enlist voluntarily in the convention's programs, but their autonomy is preserved. While this distinction appears to be a game of semantics and finesses the real, albeit informal, power that Baptist associative bodies exercise over the churches that participate in their activities, it is a definition whose internal contradictions have been held in tension or denied by Baptists until the present.

Proceedings of the BGCT, 1895, p. 36.

Hayden carried his case against the BGCT to the federal courts in 1898, filing a \$100,000 suit against the convention leaders for denying him his seat and personal damage suits against Cranfill. The original decision went through several appeals, hung juries, and was reversed by the Supreme Court of Texas. Finally, in 1905, wanting to lay the matter to rest, Cranfill privately settled out of court with Hayden.[\[footnote\]](#) Hayden's followers seceded and formed their own convention, the Baptist Missionary Association, at Troup, Texas, in 1900, but their influence steadily declined. They joined with likeminded groups from other states to form a general body in 1905 and have resisted proposals of reconciliation.[\[footnote\]](#) Carroll, pp. 800-804.

Robert A. Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People, 1609-1972* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1974), p. 282.

At first, the gnawing effect of numerous controversies, exacerbated by drought and depression in the 1890s, had a debilitating effect on the infant

Baptist state organization, but in the struggle it gradually developed strategies of resistance and survival. After four discouraged missions superintendents had retired following short terms, J. B. Gambrell of Georgia and Mississippi, former president of Mercer College, accepted the position. Gambrell impressed people as "the great commoner," but his blend of good sense, wit, and dauntless optimism were altogether uncommon. As corresponding secretary for missions from 1896 to 1910 and a frequent contributor to the Baptist Standard (he also served for seven years as its editor), he articulated a rationale for cooperation and change that the rank and file accepted. He was aided by J. B. Cranfill and the influential Standard in putting the message across, but it was George Truett, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas from 1897 to 1944 and the most popular and revered figure in Texas Baptist history, who won the positive emotional response of Texans for the convention's programs.[\[footnote\]](#) B. H. Carroll, probably the best theologian among Texas Baptists, gave orthodox legitimation to the new endeavor and was a key figure on numerous committees, as was the "perennially youthful" R. C. Buckner, who skillfully presided over the convention, sometimes holding a bunch of flowers instead of a gavel, from 1894 until 1914, his eighty-first year.[\[footnote\]](#) Carroll, p. 868. This note was written by J. B. Cranfill, Carroll's editor. Elliott, pp. 60-61.

"All organizational effort being assailed has had the happy effect of uniting the strong forces of the denomination from one side of the state to the other," J. B. Gambrell confidently told the convention in 1899,[\[footnote\]](#) and by that time slight bulges of newly-developed muscle were beginning to show. For Gambrell, proof lay in the expansion of missions, the raison d'être of cooperative work among Baptists. From a decade low of 66 missionaries supported by contributions of \$11,000 in 1896, the numbers were up to 149 missionaries and \$24,000 in 1899 and continued to rise yearly to 447 missionaries and \$133,945 in 1910, Gambrell's last year as missions superintendent. His reports were central events at annual state convention gatherings, which drew as many as 8,000 by 1903.[\[footnote\]](#) BS, November 16, 1899, p. 3. From 1898, the Standard printed the proceedings of the state convention based on a stenographer's script. See J. B. Cranfill's note in Carroll, p. 798.

BS November 12, 1903, p. 1. J. M. Carroll assumed the position of statistical secretary in 1890 and made his first report that year at the meeting of the state convention.

As a vehicle for promoting missions, the women's organization proved so effective that the women started "Sunbeam Bands" of children to instill in them mission giving and study habits, eventually adding groups for older girls (Girls' Auxiliary) and boys (Royal Ambassadors). Young adults also began meeting in the 1890s, a Baptist expression of the proliferation of similar groups nationwide. [\[footnote\]](#) The highlight of their activities was a summer retreat, held first at LaPorte, then at Palacios after 1906. Ministers had been organized since the consolidation of the state bodies and gathered annually just prior to the convention; R. C. Buckner brought together deacons to assist with his orphanage. The formation in 1922 of the Baptist Laymen's Union for adult males incorporated the final group into the organized ranks of mission soldiers. Concurrently the Sunday School Convention was marked by a similar pattern of age grading and institutionalization of materials and methods. Designations like "A-1 Schools" and "Standards of Excellence," teacher training normals, and statistics of every kind—the marks of standardization and centralization of authority—proliferated in reports of all divisions of the denominational enterprise.

John Higham, *Writing American History: Essays on Modern Scholarship* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 77.

The Baptist Standard played an indispensable role in publishing these reports, disseminating information from over the state, and boosting all activities of the convention. True to its goal to "be for the organized work of our denomination all along the line," [\[footnote\]](#) it legitimated the authority and programs of the burgeoning religious bureaucracy with its confident tone and wide circulation. Cranfill and Gambrell, both verbally skilled at transforming innovation into old-fashioned truth, were the primary editors from 1892 until 1914 when the BGCT purchased the Standard and made it their official publicity medium. [\[footnote\]](#)

BS, January 4, 1900, p. 4.

Cranfill edited the paper from 1892-1904, Gambrell from 1904-07, J. M. Dawson in 1907, J. Frank Norris from 1908-10, and Gambrell from 1910-

13. E. C. Routh served from 1914-29.

Even after the uniting of Waco and Baylor universities, the ideal of its serving as the cornerstone of the Texas Baptist educational system was seriously threatened. Within a few years of its establishment at Waco and with it still heavily indebted, charters for over a dozen new colleges were given to Baptists in various parts of the state. This can be partially explained by the wide distances encompassed within Texas (particularly in the rapidly-developing west) and by the booming population. Establishing a school was also a favored way of using a newly-acquired fortune to ensure the perpetuation of one's name. This overtaxed educational system was rescued, first, by a successful campaign conducted in 1891-93 by George Truett (a student at the time) and B. H. Carroll to pay off Baylor University's debt, and second, by the linking of the schools in a junior college plan. Following the example of John D. Rockefeller's dealings with the American Baptist system, Colonel C. C. Slaughter, a wealthy cattleman, seeded the money to eliminate school indebtedness, thereafter limiting the number of schools and instituting a federation of junior colleges, under the supervision of the BGCT, with Baylor University at the head, issuing final degrees. Baylor Female College in Belton continued as the only other four-year school.

The other educational advance--a marked challenge of authority to the monopoly of Baptist seminaries in the Deep South--was the building of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. Attributable to B. H. Carroll in the same way the Standard was to Cranfill, the missions program to Gambrell and the orphanage to Buckner, the seminary began as a Department of Bible at Baylor University, received its own charter in 1908, and opened in Fort Worth in 1910 with Carroll as its president.

Although Texas Baptists were not part of the "social gospel" movement that united many American Protestant churches early in the twentieth century, they definitely moved in the direction of wider participation in social causes. As John Lee Eighmy pointed out, Baptists in America have responded to social issues more significantly than is generally recognized; their interest in civil liberties, public and private morality, slavery, and laissez-faire economics during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were

testimony to the fact that they "were never aliens to temporal affairs."
[[footnote](#)] Their heightened level of interest in the decades on either side of 1900 indicated that growing investment in denominational institutions was producing a shift in the locus of progress from the supernatural realm to the natural world. Texas Baptists began designating a significant portion of their collections to benevolent causes as well as to evangelization and religious education. Buckner Orphans' Home has already been mentioned as the first charitable work that won the state's loyalty. Undertaken by an individual and supported informally by the convention through contributions, it was officially adopted by the BGCT in 1914 and placed under the direction of a convention board. After the turn of the century, Texas Baptists were converted (largely by George Truett) to the idea of building a hospital in Dallas, and they did so between 1904-09. This complex, which became known as the Baylor Hospital system, added training facilities in medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, and nursing through the 1910s. Another "sanatorium" was purchased by Baptists in Houston in 1907. Also in a benevolent vein, the convention recognized its responsibility to aged ministers and oversaw a relief fund for their benefit. Eighmy, p. x. Eighmy deals extensively with Southern Baptists' reaction to Christian social movements in the twentieth century.

Many Texas Baptist leaders were wholeheartedly committed to the temperance issues, several to the Prohibition Party. J. B. Cranfill was national vice-presidential candidate on the Prohibition ticket in 1892 and kept the anti-saloon fight alive on the pages of the Baptist Standard. That paper's support of blue laws, of labor reform, and of the American cause in World War I were further evidence of Baptists' growing compromise with church-state separation.

Capitalism and the accumulation of wealth appeared to give little cause for concern. Until the twentieth century, there were not enough worldly goods among Texas Baptists to generate many warnings about "storing up treasure on earth." After 1900, when fortunes were made in land, cattle, and oil, this clarification was made: "Wealth is not a curse per se any more than is wind and water... It is the abuse of wealth that is accursed." [[footnote](#)] The wealthy were urged to respond in a manner similar to Colonel Slaughter of Dallas, who said, "I have prayed that as He has given me a hand to get, He

would give me a heart to give." [\[footnote\]](#) An overwhelming acceptance of the growing national capitalistic enterprise—even leadership in it—is seen in the offering of stock in the San Jacinto Oil Company of Beaumont on the front page of the Baptist Standard [\[footnote\]](#) and the full-page advertisement by the Texas Company urging Baptists to vote to change Texas laws to allow oil companies to diversify, i.e., to manage their own supply and production forces. [\[footnote\]](#)

BS, October 8, 1903, p.2.

BS, January 27, 1916, p.7.

BS, February 6, 1902, p.1.

BS, January 11, 1917, p.23.

With a Puritanical delight in success as a measure of God's grace, Baptists embraced the system that enabled them to have the means to expand his kingdom on earth. They expressed nostalgia for rural values and less complicated times, but no real criticism of the economic arrangements that produced the change. Quite the contrary, having weathered the flurry of challenges to the centralization of power for state denominational work, they further refined the organization based on a business model. They gave real executive power to the Executive Board of the BGCT in 1914, "such powers and authority as may be necessary to carry on the work of the Convention." [\[footnote\]](#) And they sought to reduce the duplication of tasks and appeals by grouping the concerns of the convention into major headings, each collective making one appeal at a specific time of the year. The efficiency model remained incomplete—budget deficits continued to plague them until they inaugurated a systematic pledging program in the 1920s—but defensiveness about applying it to a religious agency had disappeared. Further controversies were based more on the issue of who held the power rather than the legitimacy of centralized power itself. Constitution of the BGCT, Article V. Section 4.

A transition was made by Texas Baptists between 1880 and 1920; they enlarged the scope of their projects and institutions and accepted the concomitant bureaucratic organization and power. One of them described the change as a transformation of their definition of "freedom": "A new conception of freedom was forming," J. M. Dawson explained, "freedom to cooperate instead of freedom to obstruct. . . ." [\[footnote\]](#) Indeed they

changed considerably from the atomistic individualism and autonomous churches of the nineteenth century, loosely bound if bound at all, to boast in 1919: "When Baptists organize they succeed; when Baptists do not organize they fail."[\[footnote\]](#)

Elliott, p. 61.

BS, June 12, 1919, p. 22.

Women's activities prior to 1880

The organization of Baptist women in Texas followed the same general pattern of development demonstrated by the other denominational state bodies: a few loosely bound groups formed prior to the Civil War; wider cooperative efforts were made during the 1870s and 1880s; consolidation and standardization finally were achieved with the formal statewide unification of missionary forces in 1886. The deviation exhibited by women's groups was steadier numerical and financial growth, greater efficiency, more inner cohesion, and less dramatic confrontations than the denomination as a whole experienced.

Baptist women's activities prior to 1880 cannot be discovered from women's own writing or archives, but must be deduced from oral tradition and the references made by male historians; specifically, J. B. Link, who published two volumes of the Texas Historical and Biographical Magazine, a collection of Baptist records and recollections, in 1891-92 and J. M. Carroll, whose voluminous history published in 1923 reflected fifty years of his own experience and research as well as material gathered by other Baptists, dating back to the 1840s.^[footnote] From these sources, tradition has kept alive the story of Massie Millard and the prayer meeting held in a thicket near Nacogdoches in 1832, although rather than her praying for safety from Indian raiders, as Link implies,^[footnote] a revisionist view in a later Woman's Missionary Union history suggests that Mrs. Millard and the women with her "prayed for and tried to help the Mexican and Indian women into whose territory they had come."^[footnote] Annette Lea Bledsoe and her sister Margaret, who became the wife of Sam Houston, were other Baptist heroines. Mrs. Bledsoe came from cultured family life in Alabama to the wilds of Texas in 1835, where she is credited with organizing, along with Massie Millard, the first Baptist woman's society at the Nacogdoches church. She and the Houstons made their home in Independence after 1841 where Annette Bledsoe became what Link termed "a home missionary," visiting and teaching from settlement to settlement, including the Spanish-speaking.^[footnote] The Lea family silver was cast into a bell for the Independence Baptist Church.

Carroll, pp. ix-xi.

Link, I, 24.

Inez B. Hunt, *Century One: A Pilgrimage of Faith* (Woman's Missionary Union, 1979), p. 10. Historical accounts through the 1930s made no attempt to hide disdain for the Mexicans and Indians whose territory was invaded by colonists, but felt that a superior people and system justified the takeover. "The fair land was to be redeemed from the haunts of blood-thirsty savages" by these "Anglo-American people" was their common sentiment. Quote from Mrs. W. J. J. Smith, *A Centennial History of the Baptist Women of Texas: 1830-1930* (Dallas: Woman's Missionary Union of Texas, 1933), p. 16.
Link, II, 294-96.

Numerous nameless women and those about whom nothing is known beyond their names constituted a portion of the membership of each church that was formed, and in some cases they held the body together ("the sisters [took] very decisive action against its dissolution" reported Link about one church).[\[footnote\]](#) Thomas Pilgrim had some women enlisted to teach in his Sunday school before it was suppressed by the Mexican government, [\[footnote\]](#) but, according to Z. N. Morrell, another woman met Mexican resistance with more success:
Link, II, 273.
Carroll, p. 42.

"There was a pious sister named Echols who lived near Gonzales. She was a devoted Baptist and loved her Bible dearly. The Bible, however, was a prohibited book, and severe penalties were meted out if one were found in a family's possession. On one occasion, Sister Echols saw a Mexican justice approaching and was tempted to hide the Bible she had been reading. She quickly committed her way unto the Lord and kept the Bible in her hands. Witnessing her devotion to the Book of God, the Mexican justice's heart failed him, and he allowed her to keep it.[\[footnote\]](#)"
Morrell, P. 73.

Women were also recorded making gifts of their "mites" and performing benevolent acts, maintaining their posts "at the bedside of the sick and administering to the wants of the poor."[\[footnote\]](#) Dr. John Lockhart painted a colorful picture of those "good old mothers of the olden times" in his reminiscences of the days of the Republic of Texas, published in the

Galveston Daily News in 1897. After making early-Sunday preparations for a large meal, they would don their black silk dresses and bonnets that "had seen service away back in the states." Once in church, they generally occupied the benches near the front so there was space "to [spread] down their riding skirts for their babies to wallow on."[\[footnote\]](#) Dr. Lockhart analyzed those times as "more primitive in habits, customs, and religion" than the late-nineteenth century and claimed the women entered wholeheartedly into the worship: "The old sisters were not ashamed to praise God in audible voices and the preachers knew it, and were loth to say nay to it."[\[footnote\]](#)

Link, I, 286.

Wallis, Jonnie L., *Sixty Years on the Brazos: The Life and Letters of Dr. John Washington Lockhart, 1824-1900* (Waco: Texian Press, 1967), p. 147. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

Another portrait of the informal, familial piety manifested by Texas Baptist women in the mid-nineteenth century was left by Mrs. Elizabeth Pyle of Ladonia, in northeast Texas, referring to an associational gathering of seventy-five (representatives of several churches within a geographical area) held in a private home. The women of the family prepared food for the group ahead of time and served it on long tables outdoors, ladling coffee from a large kettle in the yard. Men slept in the living room, women in the bedroom, and the overflow in the covered wagons in which they had traveled.[\[footnote\]](#)

Mr s. W. J. J. Smith, p. 53. Mrs. B. A. Copass indicated that this scene was duplicated many times "even down to the nineties." Elliott, p. 207.

The groups of women that gathered in other Baptist churches throughout the state, as they did in Nacogdoches around Mrs. Bledsoe and Mrs. Millard, were called by various names: "Ladies Aid Society," "Industrial Society," or "Dorcas Society"[\[footnote\]](#) were common, with "Mission Societies" becoming more popular in the 1870s when interest in that phase of religious activity intensified. The focus of the early groups appeared to be preparing and maintaining places of worship. Predictably, the most active societies formed around Independence where Baylor University provided ample opportunities for women's traditional ministrations. Not only were there church buildings, but dormitories as well, to be equipped

and furnished and students to be welcomed and socialized. Acceptance of women organizing to fill these functions was no doubt enhanced by the presence of a number of female students and teachers and by male administrators who were sympathetic to advanced education for women. William Carey Crane, president of Baylor University from 1864 to 1885, was one of those strong advocates of women's banding together for religious causes. As a result of these conducive conditions, the first woman missionary from Texas and the first state president of the Woman's Missionary Union (hereafter, abbreviated WMU)—in fact, the heart of that organization—were from Independence.

Named after a biblical woman known for her good deeds, particularly her sewing for widows. Acts 9:36-41.

In other parts of the state sewing groups and aid societies met with more resistance, particularly in East Texas. Disapproval formed on the general basis of their presence representing "innovation" and for the specific cause that women were overstepping their God-given boundaries. Mrs. Pyle, the daughter of a minister, gave a patronizing explanation of the situation:

"Even the more enlightened of [the ministers and leading Baptists] were shy of women's societies. They were not sure that women knew how to carry on alone, not realizing their women had wonderful training in managing their homes, their children, and even their husbands, though the poor dears knew it not.[\[footnote\]](#)"

Mrs. W. J. J. Smith, p. 27.

The General Association felt strongly enough on the issue to amend its constitution in 1869 to restrict membership to males after three women had been seated by making the requisite \$5.00 contribution.

Resistance to a threat often forms only after that threat is real and its direction irreversible. Such was the case with the disapproval that arose in the 1870s over women's expanded role in church and society. That expansion, however, had become a fact with the Civil War. J. M. Carroll dated the change from that period, claiming that "[d]uring the war period our women had to act as men for our people. No historian will ever be able to tell how gloriously this was done by our brave Texas women."[\[footnote\]](#) Church historian W. W. Sweet also credited the impact of that war with a

general rise in lay representation in American churches, including women's groups.[\[footnote\]](#) Not that the Baptist church in Texas was sufficiently cohesive and numerous or the women confident and energetic enough to assert themselves immediately. Re-resistance to women's organizing, even to fill a traditional supportive role, continued in Texas until the 1890s and in the SBC well into the twentieth century. It was kept alive largely by influential leaders who were products of pre-Civil War society, and it was successful insofar as deference for those men kept women from public roles, forced them to draw support mainly from other women, and curtailed activity in places where those leaders exercised power. But, however slowly and circumspectly, women gathered and formed organizations, outlining new avenues of religious service for themselves.

Carroll, p. 312.

William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1930), p. 480.

With hindsight, the conditions for Baptist women's rise appear clearcut and inevitable. During the Civil War and on the frontier, women had proven to themselves that they could function in areas where they had previously been led to believe they were weak or deficient. Texas Baptist churches were needy, having been inactivated and demoralized by the war and Reconstruction. Nationally, an interest in missions, spearheaded by lay groups, was spreading through all Protestant denominations. Secular developments, such as communication and transportation networks, facilitated interaction and organizational growth. In short, the churches needed women's activity and support too badly to suppress them long, and women and missions were such a congenial combination that once they were linked, the success of both women's organizations and the mission enterprise seemed guaranteed.

The end of Reconstruction caused an acceleration of organization among women—a WMU historian listed eight groups that formed in the 1870s[\[footnote\]](#)—but there was no coordination among them to parallel the district associations and state conventions that the general denomination was forming. Forty years later, Mary Hill Davis remembered the era this way:

Mrs. W. J. J. Smith, p. 32.

"So far the work among the women had been as fragmentary and disconnected as the building by each bird of her nest in the spring. . . . think of thousands of women near and far, interested in the same thing, working at the same tasks, yet each isolated in her own community, cut off from the benefit of the experience of those who had walked the path before her, perhaps solved her difficulties, and gone on to greater things. Contact with other minds and other methods, the enthusiasm that comes with numbers, and the multiplied interest of a body of workers, all these were unknown factors in the work of women. . . .[\[footnote\]](#)"

BS, December 14, 1911, p. 14. The address was given by Mary Hill Davis at the silver anniversary of Texas BWMW.

The specific impetus to cooperate came both from without the state (a call from the SBC) and from within (Anne Luther's decision to serve as a missionary). Among the southern states, one of the most active Baptist women's groups formed in Baltimore. Ann Baker Graves, a member of the Baltimore band, called other women to meet with her during the annual SBC meeting in 1868 to pray for the missions in China, where her son served. She also began a correspondence with women in other states and originated a collection plan for missions called "mite boxes"—small red paper boxes with an opening in the top for coins.[\[footnote\]](#) In a committee report given to the 1872 Convention, the Foreign Mission Board of the SBC took note, praised "the hand of the Lord . . . moving in the hearts of Christian women in England and America to organize," and heartily recommended the sending of unmarried women to the mission field.[\[footnote\]](#) The suggestion met an unfavorable response.[\[footnote\]](#) Denominational giants like seminary professor John A. Broadus and Kentucky editor T. T. Eaton led the opposition, yet pro-woman forces slowly brought the Convention around by 1878 to the acceptance of a plan calling for each state to appoint a central committee of women to further mission causes, thus setting the stage for convention-wide cooperation.[\[footnote\]](#) The Foreign Mission Board and its secretary, H. A. Tupper, were among the foremost champions of this move because of women's potential mission support and because they knew that if the convention did not cooperate with its women, it could lose control of that phase of denominational work altogether. Probably the latter argument, "predicated on fear of the women setting up a separate organization as women in the

North had done," gained more male support for women's work in the South than did any other.[\[footnote\]](#) It also explains why the SBC carefully spelled out the fact that the women's central state committees that formed would be auxiliary to the state conventions and to the SBC.

Alma Hunt, *History of Woman's Missionary Union* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1964; rev. ed., 1976), pp. 12-13. These boxes, as did "mite societies," referred to the biblical story of the widow who made a small, but sacrificial gift of two mites. Mark 12:42-44; Luke 21:1-3.

Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1872, p. 35.

A. Hunt, p. 13.

Proceedings of the SBC, 1878, pp. 31-32.

A. Hunt, p. 21.

In response to this call in 1878, women in the Independence church formed a Texas central committee for missions with Fannie Breedlove Davis as president and Anne Luther, corresponding secretary. The urgency of their task was enhanced by the fact that Miss Luther, daughter of the president of Baylor Female College, had volunteered the same year to serve as a missionary (Texas's first). The two wrote to other women in churches that comprised the State Convention and suggested that they convene when the annual state meeting was held. Their hours of laboriously hand-copying scores of letters were repaid when female representatives from twelve congregations met in the basement of the First Baptist Church in Austin on Sunday afternoon, October 3, 1880, and determined to form a Woman's Missionary Union (a name later adopted uniformly by SBC women's organizations). Fannie B. Davis was chosen president and \$35.45 was collected for missions.[\[footnote\]](#) Tradition has it that at the same hour, Anne Luther was examined in the auditorium overhead by the State Mission Board and was subsequently approved to serve as a missionary in Brazil. Two men, F. M. Law and O. C. Pope, presided over that first session and recorded the minutes. The election of officers and adoption of a constitution took place the following day.

The records of the development of women's organizations in the General Association are less complete than those of the State Convention. Ladies' aid and industrial groups existed within churches, including one which raised \$500 to lay the foundation of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, and

a foreign mission society was begun in Dallas in 1879.^[footnote] Several Baptist state historians refer to a "Ladies General Aid Society" that functioned as a confederation of women's organizations among Baptists in the north central and northeast part of the state, but none gives a primary source for that information.^[footnote] If such a formal grouping existed, it did not have the missionary focus and organizational base that already characterized the WMU of the State Convention. There is evidence, however, that groups of women from both conventions met in a consolidated body when the conventions merged in 1886. A Waco woman recorded that the seam joining the two was not instantly invisible for the women still identified with their old groups, but at the urging of the men, "tears dissolved" the previous separate associations,^[footnote] and a new statewide association, Baptist Women Mission Workers (hereafter, abbreviated BWMW), was formed. In the decades that followed, the identity of BWMW and WMU merged, and the latter name was readopted in 1919 to conform with the rest of the SBC. The origin of statewide women's activities came to be dated 1880, rather than 1886; Texas WMU celebrated its centennial in 1980 at Austin's First Baptist Church, scene of the original State Convention women's gathering. Further evidence of the continuity between the original WMU and BWMW is seen in the fact that Fannie B. Davis was elected to continue as president of the organization that was born in 1886, and she served until 1895.

Mrs. W. J. J. Smith, p. 32.

Some examples are Baker, *The Blossoming Desert*, p. 150; Elliott, p. 211; Mrs. W. J. J. Smith, p. 40. Probably most authoritative is Annie Buckner Beddoe's statement that there was a "Ladies General Aid Society of North Texas auxiliary to the General Association" prior to 1886 in the BS, June 7, 1917, p. 7. Her father, R. C. Buckner, was a leader in both the General Association and the BGCT.

Historical Sketch, *Woman's Auxiliary, Waco Baptist Association* (1928), p. 6.

The administration of Fannie B. Davis, 1880-95

Fannie Breedlove Davis was clearly the "moving spirit"[\[footnote\]](#) of Texas Baptist women in their initial phase of cooperative association, through their gathering forces from all populated areas of the state, and in their participation in the formation of a southern union of women. Born in Virginia in 1833, she exhibited, by her own admission, a pious, intelligent nature as a child. She considered it a "grave injustice" that she was not permitted to study Latin like her brothers.[\[footnote\]](#) After her family emigrated to Independence, Texas, in 1847 she attended and later taught at Baylor College. She married George B. Davis, a Baptist merchant, in 1855. Both the Breedlove and Davis families were among those who formed the church and community backbone of Washington County. George Davis's sister Mary was an early faculty member of Baylor College; another sister was married to Horace Clark, principal of that institution from 1851 to 1871. Charles Breedlove, Fannie's brother, was a popular Brenham lawyer and influential Baptist layman. Her granddaughters later marked the height of Mrs. Davis's elevated position in the community by the fact that she was one of two women in Independence who owned a hat to wear to church instead of a bonnet. (The other was worn by Mrs. William Carey Crane, wife of the president of Baylor University, and both hats had been purchased by Mr. Davis on one of his buying trips to the East.)[\[footnote\]](#) *BS*, January 14, 1915, p. 32, quoting a eulogy given Fannie B. Davis by J. M. Carroll. B. F. Riley, *History of the Baptists of Texas* (Dallas: published by author, 1907), p. 273, calls her the "indwelling spirit" of woman's work. I. Hunt, p. 20, quoting a letter written by Fannie B. Davis, preserved in the archives of Mary Hardin-Baylor College, Belton, Texas. Personal interview with Georgia Robinson Smith and Mary Esther Robinson Hill, granddaughters of Fannie Davis, in Austin, Texas, May 19, 1980.

Fannie and George Davis had two daughters, but one died in childhood. The other, Mary Roselle (Mrs. C. S. Robinson), attended Vassar, probably fulfilling her mother's dream rather than her own, for after one year she returned to Texas to stay. She had five daughters, some of whom were virtually reared by Fannie Davis, who lived nearby. Remembered as a good seamstress, cook, and housekeeper, Mrs. Davis clearly fulfilled the domestic expectations of her day. But her energy, intelligence, and financial

status enabled her also to play a broader role in carving a more prominent place for women among Southern Baptists. A male ministerial student at Baylor recalled having at first been surprised at the extent of her religious work, but by studying her he became convinced of the legitimacy of her activity. He remembered her giving receptions in her home for the young men and women and counseling students of both sexes. As a woman in her forties she was still "the center of life" at school picnics, and she worked actively in an early temperance group, "United Friends of Temperance."

[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, January 14, 1915, p. 32.

Her ability and desire to travel, both within and outside Texas, gave her the dimensions of a denominational worker as well as a "church worker." She attended SBC meetings all over the South, the American Centennial in Philadelphia in 1876, and the Chicago World's Fair in 1893.[\[footnote\]](#)

Probably the fact that she was a mature married woman lent an aura of respectability to her journeys around the state on behalf of women's work, although even with her capital of good will, she met resistance—at times, "strenuous opposition."[\[footnote\]](#)

The latter two trips, indicative of the extent of her travels even as an older woman, were proudly related by her granddaughters, who remembered souvenirs she bought.

BS, December 14, 1911, p. 15.

During Fannie Davis's tenure as president of WMU and BMWW, particularly the first decade, the confederation remained weak and its organization primitive, but it kept alive the ideal of Baptist women working in concert and focused some attention on the financial contributions of women to denominational causes. Groups of women continued to form in a growing number of churches, but they adopted a variety of names and projects and were slow to affiliate with WMU, probably attributable more to lack of communication and precedent than to principled resistance.

"Anne Luther Societies" proliferated after Miss Luther's appointment to the mission field and pledged to supply her annual support of \$600. Anne Breaker Court, member of such a society in Houston, recalled their holding ice cream parties and oyster suppers and piecing a quilt, charging ten cents for each name embroidered on a square, to make up their \$5 monthly share

of that amount.[\[footnote\]](#) Other areas of mission focus were Indians (to a limited degree) and Mexicans. In 1883 the WMU report indicates that \$600 was given to build a chapel in San Antonio, \$2000 to build a church in Laredo, and over \$500 to support two women who worked among women and children in Mexico.[\[footnote\]](#) But extending into the 1890s women's groups generally lacked a missionary focus and gave both their money and attention to local efforts. The BMWW annual report for 1888 makes that fact quite explicit: \$6,634 of the \$9,700 reported went for "local church work."[\[footnote\]](#) Specifically, that included such items as retiring a church debt, painting the building, buying new lamps, paying a sexton, and contributing to charitable causes.

Mrs. W. J. J. Smith, p. 156. The popularity of Anne Luther's cause was probably more a result of her association with Baylor College than of the formation of WMU. The former institution's influence was much greater than the latter during the 1880s.

Ibid., p. 40.

Annual Report of the BMWW of Texas, 1388, p. 40.

During this period the reported contributions of the Texas Baptist women's organization rose from \$35 in 1880 to over \$6,000 in 1883, \$7,000 in 1884, and \$9,700 in 1888. These high figures reflected the diligence of Fannie Davis or a competent corresponding secretary and the selection of a central location for the annual meeting; in contrast, there are no records of cash contributions in 1885 or 1886 when Mrs. Davis was reportedly in Mexico.[\[footnote\]](#) These figures are also evidence of the fact that reporting methods were poor, that the office of corresponding secretary was undefined and undeveloped, and that Mrs. Davis personally held the organization together. As an energetic self-starter attempting to lead a loosely formed alliance of often-timid members, she tended to fill every role in matriarchal style. She carried on handwritten correspondence with participating societies, canvassed the state on behalf of particular causes, and served as liaison with missionaries and with the SBC, as well as convening and presiding over annual meetings. Her authoritative style was encouraged by the fact that the women initially attracted to the movement, including Anne Luther and others who formed the first state mission committee, were of her daughter's generation rather than her own. As her successor expressed it, "[t]he

president, Mrs. Davis, loved the work like a mother loves her child. She appeared to feel the whole burden was on her." [\[footnote\]](#)

Mrs. W. J. J. Smith, p. 182.

Ibid., p. 138, quoting Mrs. W. L. Williams.

Minutes of local societies indicate that programs usually consisted of a prayer, a song, a scripture reading, and occasionally a devotional message, followed by business transactions. [\[footnote\]](#) The same general format was observed at the annual state meetings, with the addition of reports from any missionary present, but the latter appear to have been fortunate happenstances. Not until 1888 was the motion finally made that in the future "the ladies of the place at which the meeting is held, in consultation with, and aided by the state officers, shall prepare the program for said meeting." [\[footnote\]](#) Male missionaries and

Historical Sketch, Woman's Auxiliary, Waco Baptist Association (1928), p. 9.

Annual Report of the BWMW of Texas, 1888, p. 42.

denominational officers also frequently addressed the women, and reports of women's work were always brought to the state association meeting and read by a man. As simple as this procedure appears, it stymied the small groups of women that met in local churches. Through the 1890s poignant letters from women appeared in denominational papers telling of difficulties in knowing what to do when they met and in finding even a single person to speak out. "None of them ever belonged to anything of the kind before," explained one writer, in whose society only one woman would lead a public prayer. [\[footnote\]](#) "At first it comes hard to lead in prayer," confessed another woman, "but if we are only willing to try, God will speak through us." [\[footnote\]](#) Editorial response continually prodded the reticent:

BS, September 26, 1895, p. 7.

BS, February 9, 1893, p. 2.

"Don't refuse to do any kind of work that is put upon you in your society because you don't know how. You will never learn younger--there is more force in that old saying than we are accustomed to credit to it. If you had not been refusing to do so many things so long you might have had some experience by this time. Enter right into the work and you will be

astonished to see how quickly you can learn and how easy and pleasant it is after you know.[\[footnote\]](#)"
BS, March 31, 1892, p. 7.

The assistance with methods and personnel that Fannie Davis's extraordinary personal efforts required in order to strengthen and unify the fledgling Texas BMWU came in the latter half of her administration from three main sources: the organization of a southwide WMU, the naming of Mina Everett as a paid organizer for Texas women's mission work, and the development of a state newspaper forum for Baptist women. The first of these, the formation of a SBC women's organization, had been facilitated by calling for the organization of the state central committees of women in 1878. Some members of these committees met informally at the SBC meeting throughout the 1880s to exchange experiences. Fannie Davis was present in Baltimore in 1884 at such a gathering for "prayer and consultation."[\[footnote\]](#) By 1887 the circulation of women's mission publications and the effective correspondence of female missionaries (particularly, Edmonia and Lottie Moon, who served in China), gave the women enough resolve to face resistance head-on and call for an official convocation of three female delegates from each state represented in the SBC to meet at the 1888 convention in Baltimore for the specific purpose of forming a general organization. Prefacing their action with the acknowledgement that "the brethren are our guardians . . . [we] are only trying to follow them as our leaders and trying to carry into practice what they have taught us from pulpit and press,"[\[footnote\]](#) the women from ten states adopted a constitution and elected officers. Although the officers were from the eastern states and headquarters were established in Baltimore, Fannie Davis and two other representatives from Texas were there and stood firmly in favor of the new organization.

A. Hunt, p. 20. According to Hunt, men were barred from these gatherings except by special invitation to speak.

Ibid., p. 30, quoting from organizational minutes of WMU, Richmond, Virginia, 1888.

Indicative that the women took masculine discouragement and charges of non-biblical insubordination seriously, they adopted a unique posture toward the SBC, made explicit in their name, "Woman's Missionary Union,

Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention," and in the preamble to their constitution:

"We, the women of the churches connected with the Southern Baptist Convention, desirous of stimulating the missionary spirit and the grace of giving among the women and children of the churches, and aiding in collecting funds for missionary purposes, to be disbursed by the Boards of the Southern Baptist Convention, and disclaiming all intention of independent action, organize and adopt the following . . ." (*italics mine*)."

This compromise—the establishment of an exclusively female society that assumed a voluntarily dependent relationship to the larger institution led by males—was unique among American women's missionary societies, but one that was consistent with biblically conservative southern culture. The women wanted their own organization, one in which they were not as restricted as they were in a mixed arrangement (which was invariably patriarchal); but at the same time, they were confident that their primary interests—evangelism and the promotion of missions—were identical with those of the men in the denomination and that they could effectively use traditional, informal means of influencing the decisions made by those males. The same compromise between changing culture and prevailing orthodoxy had been spelled out in Texas when the BWMW and BGCT formed in 1886. The (male) committee on women's work reported to the convention that

"[i]t would afford us great pleasure to have our sisters work side by side with us in all our associations and conventions just as they do in our churches, but if they elect to do otherwise, then we cordially accord them our confidence in organizations of their own. We would recommend,"

First, That their general organizations be made strictly auxiliary to our State and General Conventions, i.e., in all Foreign Mission work to let their contributions pass through the treasury of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, and those to Home, State and Sunday-school Missions, Ministerial Education, etc., through the treasuries of our state general organizations. [\[footnote\]](#)

Proceedings of the BGCT, 1886, p. 30.

The deferential quality of this cooperative arrangement was praised by men and women alike. For some female leaders it operated more satisfactorily once they had established a network of local and state treasurers who funneled women's collections directly to the boards.^[footnote] (As long as that money was included in local church treasury reports or enumerated in the variety of ways that prevailed before other uniform methods were established, reports on women's gifts were obviously lower and less accurate.) In 1895 a Baptist Standard editorial (probably written by J. B. Cranfill) lamented the fact that true cooperation had not been possible, but that two separate conventions for men and women had been necessary in order to give women a place to enlarge their sphere of religious activity. The writer felt that the SBC was clearly to blame for having excluded women as messengers, and that, given their options, the women were more than justified in forming their own body.^[footnote] As compromises go, the arrangement functioned well for the conservative group involved. Women undoubtedly gained skills, confidence, and recognition they would not have acquired by blending with the male-dominated denominational structure. Men gradually accepted the arrangement as expedient on biblical grounds and greatly beneficial in financial terms. And of no little significance in its success was the fact that during that period of enthusiasm and progress for Southern Baptists, it was possible for the mission cause to take precedence over the question of power. For most women, the most important issue was that both sexes were "working in a common cause, with a common faith, for a common Master."^[footnote]

BS, May 17, 1894, p. 8.

BS, November 21, 1895, p. 5.

BS, March 1, 1894, p. 7.

Once the convention-wide WMU was firmly established, its leadership provided valuable information on methods and procedures for each state organization. Culling successful ideas from various states and sharpening them with administrative acumen was the primary work of Annie Armstrong, corresponding secretary of WMU-SBC from 1888-1906. The presidents, Martha McIntosh (1888-92) and Fannie E. S. Heck (1892-94, 1895-99, 1906-15), were skilled in persuasion and public relations, as well as administration. By the 1890s both officers generally gave or sent messages to state women's gatherings. While their messages began on an

inspirational note, they also included examples of reports, plans for collecting those reports, suggestions for study topics, and financial statements from mission and educational boards. Texas women adopted many of the suggestions, such as "prayer cards" (a monthly reminder to pray for a specific evangelistic effort), "mite boxes," special collections during the Christmas season, and an annual "week of prayer."

In 1887 the Texas BWMW named an executive board, consisting of the four general officers and five district vice-presidents, to give Fannie B. Davis administrative help. The effectiveness of designating responsibility and electing an energetic corresponding secretary, Minnie Slaughter, [\[footnote\]](#) nearly tripled annual contributions in one year (from \$3,298.99 to \$9,700.38), but that leap was not as significant as the one that was recorded between 1889 and 1890 (\$4,728.38 to \$17,394.11). The crucial difference in that advance was the appointment of Mina Everett as a salaried field worker for missions, jointly supported by the SBC Foreign and Home Mission Boards and Texas's State Mission Board.

Miss Slaughter was the daughter of C. C. Slaughter, the wealthy cattleman who was benefactor to many Texas Baptist causes.

In contrast to Fannie Davis, Mina Everett was unmarried and had been reared as a "skeptic." She experienced a radical conversion as an adult while visiting an aunt in Dublin, Texas. In 1885 she travelled with a group to Monterey, Mexico, for the dedication of a church building and was so inspired by the occasion that she sacrificed several personal items in order to send a missionary to Mexico. When General A. T. Hawthorne, the foreign mission agent for Texas, heard of her sacrificial offering, he wrote to her suggesting that she be that missionary. She consented, but the appointment was changed and she went to Brazil instead. [\[footnote\]](#)

Carroll, pp. 859-62. J. M. Carroll was one of those who travelled to Mexico with Miss Everett; he also preached the farewell sermon when she departed for Brazil.

Unfortunately Miss Everett contracted both yellow fever and beriberi while in Brazil and had to return to Texas, but she found it difficult to relinquish her religious vocation. At the request of Hawthorne she made a "missionary tour" limited to "house-to-house visits and addresses to women's meetings,"

and she worked among the Mexicans in San Antonio. There she confessed to Fannie Davis her desire to be employed full-time as a mission organizer. Their correspondence with the SBC boards and friendship with Texas Baptist officers resulted in her appointment at \$75 a month (she insisted they reduce it to \$50 lest she evoke criticism that salary was her motive).

[\[footnote\]](#)

Mrs. W. J. J. Smith, p. 42.

Mina Everett's effectiveness was beyond question. Audiences sat with "rapt attention and tear-dimmed eyes" [\[footnote\]](#) as she addressed them with "pathos and power." [\[footnote\]](#) J. M. Carroll related a story of hearing her speak to the Nacogdoches Association out under the trees before their Sunday morning worship hour:

BS, August 29, 1895, p. 7.

Annual Report of the BWMW of Texas, 1887, p. 76.

"Timidly, womanly, tearfully, prayerfully and powerfully she spoke. There was not a dry eye in that large audience. The people were strangely and mightily moved, and the author himself being wonderfully impressed...closed by asking Miss Mina to take a hat and take a foreign mission offering. She did it tearfully, gracefully, modestly. The hat was literally filled to running over. The cash collection that day was more than had been given by the whole Association for all missions during the whole preceding year. [\[footnote\]](#)"

Carroll, p. 862.

Women were less likely to describe Mina Everett's timidity; quite in contrast, they praised the intelligence and toughness that moved her to overcome obstacles that "to timid hearts would have been insurmountable" [\[footnote\]](#) and described her as "a progressive in woman's realm." [\[footnote\]](#) BS, December 14, 1911, p. 15.

Mrs. W. J. J. Smith, p. 49.

If that toughness was not yet present on the occasion Carroll described, Everett developed it in the period she served as corresponding secretary to the BWMW and field organizer for the mission boards. Because her tenure extended into the Hayden-BGCT controversy of the 1890s, she came under criticism, as did all phases of organized mission work. In the face of

Hayden's criticism of interchurch mission activities, men of the stature of B. H. Carroll became defensive, and in 1895 he went before the women and suggested they disband. Mrs. W. J. J. Smith described the reaction:

"Someone rose and asked: "Well, Dr. Carroll, do you not think that women can be serviceable in church work?" To which he answered: "In my church I have the women divided into circles, and when I need a certain kind of work done I call on a certain circle, and if I have a different character of work to be done I call on another circle." Whereupon Miss Mina, of courageous heart, spoke to him through his ear trumpet, without which he could not hear at all: "Will you tell us, Dr. Carroll, by what Scriptural authority you direct your women's work?" Looking at her in quiet dignity, he laid aside his ear trumpet. Thus ended the discussion.[\[footnote\]](#)"
Ibid., pp. 49-50.

Despite a depression and denominational unrest, the number of women's societies advanced in the early 1890s due to Mina Everett's travelling for that expressed purpose. Fannie Davis, who had moved to San Antonio and was approaching sixty years of age, had to curtail her travels, but was not one to become disengaged. In 1889 she began editing a paper called The Texas Baptist Worker to inform Texas women about missions; her husband served as business manager.[\[footnote\]](#) The paper continued to be printed for eight years when it was consolidated with The Missionary Messenger, the publication of the state mission board. The popular Baptist Standard also included a "woman's department" from its inception in 1892. Hollie Harper, editor of the section, made a personal plea to the "sisters" to make it their forum. She printed the letters she got from women all over the state detailing their spiritual successes and struggles, added her own encouraging notes, publicized BMW and WMU information, and reported on the activities of missionaries. Responses to the paper indicated a depth of sororal feeling among the women, and Hollie Harper appeared to have engendered it, as well. The repetitious "Dear Sisters . . ." expressed both a need and its fulfillment, as did these typical expressions:
Annual Report of the BMW of Texas, 1889, n. p. My research has not located any existing copies of this publication.

"I visited a sister yesterday who had four of her family sick . . .[\[footnote\]](#)"
"My dear sister, I have so often thought of your sweet words of love and admonition . . .[\[footnote\]](#)" "She greeted me with the affection of a sister . . . there was a prevailing [sic] feeling of kinship.[\[footnote\]](#)" "The meeting was delightful because of the sweet harmony that pervaded every session. Oh, how we love the sisters of our Union.[\[footnote\]](#)"

BS, March 2, 1893, p. 2

BS, November 9, 1893, p. 7.

BS, November 26, 1895, p. 7.

BS, June 1, 1893, p. 3.

Although the letters were written during troubled times for Texas Baptists, neither they nor the BMWW reports and minutes ever addressed, much less took sides publicly in the power struggle between S. A. Hayden and various BGCT leaders. The most direct reference was made in Mina Everett's 1894 report as corresponding secretary; there she alluded to "hindrances that have been greater than helps" and stated that "[t]rue fellowship has not prevailed." Later she clarified that the lack of fellowship had been from "without" the BMWW and that the hindrances from within were limited to the lack of organization.[\[footnote\]](#) Three steps were taken at the meeting that year to correct the latter: first, a "Plan of Work" committee was appointed to coordinate activities throughout the year for the state body and for each society; second, an executive committee was to be selected with power to carry on the work of the executive board between sessions; and third, the BMWW accepted space for executive headquarters offered them in the American Baptist Publishing House in Dallas.

BS, October 25, 1894, p. 7.

In one historian's evaluation, the meeting "proved to be the pivot on which the machinery turned in the right direction."[\[footnote\]](#) The administrative decisions did give the primitive organizational gears of the BMWW the grooves with which they could begin to mesh and move with more swiftness and ease, but they removed it from Fannie Davis's intimate, single-leader style. And they bore the signs of the shifting of the center of Baptist activity from the early-settled regions of south central Texas to the Dallas-Waco axis. According to records, family illness kept Mrs. Davis from following through on the appointment of the executive committee and

from attending the session in 1895, when she declined to serve further as president. The situation was complicated by her sympathy with Hayden. [\[footnote\]](#) She did not, however, retire to inactivity. She and her husband became mainstays of Hayden's newspaper as "Aunt Fanny and Uncle George," authors of a children's column, and they began a Saturday Industrial School in San Antonio.

Mrs. W. J. J. Smith, p. 44.

This fact was affirmed by Georgia Smith, Fannie Davis's granddaughter.

At a BMW Silver Anniversary ceremony in 1911, Fannie Davis was named "President Emeritus" and honored as the one to whom the organization was indebted for its life. A \$5,000 memorial in her honor was given to the Church Building and Loan Fund of the Home Mission Board after her death in 1915, and twenty Fannie Breedlove Davis scholarships were endowed at Mary Hardin-Baylor College (formerly Baylor Female College) during its centennial year, 1945.

The administration of Lou B. Williams, 1895-1906.

Although Baptist women did not publicly engage in the controversy over control of the convention boards that took place in the 1890s, there was some division among them (e.g., Fannie Davis's sympathy with S. A. Hayden), and their work, like other agencies of the mission boards, was criticized and weakened. In this unstable situation, the annual BWMW meeting of 1895 was chaired by a substitute for the president, and the nominee for Mrs. Davis's permanent replacement, Lou Williams, was taken completely by surprise at her election:

"I felt I was unable and unprepared to fill the place, but blessed promises were claimed: "as thy days so shall be thy strength. . . ." "With a large family depending on me as the homemaker, I knew I could not give all my time to the work, as Mrs. Davis had done, but the faithful women who had had a part in the work and were giving of their time and their great strength so devotedly would be a great help to me, so I felt that I was not alone.

[\[footnote\]](#)"

Quoted in Mrs. W. J. J. Smith, p. 138. Mrs. Smith, Texas WMU Historian from 1924-47, was Lou B. Williams's daughter.

Lou Beckley grew up in Missouri, but came to Texas at the close of the Civil War to marry her lawyer-sweetheart, W. L. Williams. They settled in Dallas and, along with nine others, chartered the First Baptist Church in 1868. From the beginning the small group of women members of that church took responsibility for raising money to build a building, and once that was completed they went on to other charitable and benevolent endeavors. By 1879 they began supporting organized missions and were part of the consolidated women's body that formed in 1886. While Mrs. Williams had been steadily active in various phases of religious work, she was not the spokeswoman and public figure that her predecessor had been. She was present in Richmond, Virginia, when the WMU of the SBC was formed, but she was not a Texas delegate, nor did she play a leadership role in that organization during her presidency. The family demands she mentioned curtailed some of her activity: an invalid daughter died while she was president, and both a son and her husband expired within a few years of her retirement.

Mrs. Williams's retiring, uncontroversial stance was fortuitous in the transitional role she filled between two strong presidents. For ten years, she shared with the BWMW a deep faith and stability that undercut opposition and stood firm on larger goals. Although she was hailed as a model of efficiency,[\[footnote\]](#) her incapacity to travel widely forced members of the organization to share her responsibilities, then to define and enlarge them. She, on the other hand, learned to give plain-spoken speeches sprinkled with biblical admonitions that made "every lady present [feel] that they were glad that she was their leader."[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, December 14, 1911, p. 15.

BS, November 16, 1899, p. 14.

The first crisis of her tenure as president was the withdrawal of Mina Everett's support by the three boards that supplied it. Under fire themselves in the midst of Hayden's charges, the board members sought to remove sources of controversy, and one of those was Miss Everett, who was too aggressive for some of the influential pastors. They were especially critical of her speaking to groups that included men. The women responded by providing office furnishings for her in the space donated by the American Baptist Publication Society in Dallas, and the BWMW supplied support for her to carry on a voluminous correspondence with the contacts she had made in her five years of traversing the state. The next year, 1896, she reported more societies organized and more money raised than in any previous report despite her inability to travel, but compromise was not her style, and, against the wishes of the BWMW, she resigned. Although she moved out of the state, she maintained contact and ultimately had the satisfaction of knowing that seeds she had planted—suggestions of a church building loan fund, a convention-owned paper, a women's training school, and an encampment—came to fruition.[\[footnote\]](#)

Mrs. W. J. J. Smith, pp. 42-43. This unusually frank report of controversy is quoted from an anonymous source.

In 1897 the BGCT took a firm stand by denying Hayden a seat in the convention and employing a missions secretary, J. B. Gambrell, who could ride out the storm. The latter was accompanied by his equally-talented wife, Mary. Lou Williams expressed her relief and thanksgiving simply: "The objecting brethren thought the women should give up the work, but the

Lord sent Dr. and Mrs. J. B. Gambrell to Texas and through them the cause had a backing for the men and the women. That saved the cause." [\[footnote\]](#) The BWMW elected Mary Gambrell to fill the corresponding secretary's position, neglected since Mina Everett's departure, and the state Foreign Mission Board reappropriated \$200 for "woman's work." Although the minutes are silent on the matter, J. B. Cranfill inserted a brief editorial comment in the Baptist Standard following that 1897 convention in which he indicated that "the Baptist women of Texas have had troubles and estrangements as well as the men," but that they had come to a warm reconciliation. [\[footnote\]](#) The minutes do reveal that Fannie Davis was present, seconded two motions, and made an address of welcome. [\[footnote\]](#) Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 138.
BS, November 18, 1897, p. 5.
Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 9.

Mary C. Gambrell was born of fine Virginia stock and married James Bruton Gambrell, a Confederate scout from Mississippi, during the Civil War. [\[footnote\]](#) Afterward, they returned to Mississippi where she taught music and he served as a pastor, editor, and denominational leader for twenty-five years. They also reared a family, including J. B. Gambrell, "Recollections of Confederate Scout Service," unpublished MS, Historical Commission of the SBC, Nashville, Tenn. (Microfilm publication 282). Gambrell took part in Pickett's charge at Gettysburg, after which he stole through Federal lines to wed Mary Corbell, a cousin of Pickett's wife.

a son who was killed as a young man in a temperance-related struggle. [\[footnote\]](#) In 1893 Dr. Gambrell was named president of Mercer College in Georgia. Both of the Gambrells embodied the extremely attractive but rare posture of the liberal-minded Southerner: they embraced change with intelligence and common sense, yet without sacrificing tradition, manners, and good humor.

Texas Baptist and Herald (Dallas), May 13, 1887, n.p.

Texas was the Gambrells' last challenge. They saw its Baptist potential and gave their final years to building and securing its cooperative institutions. In addition to her BWMW work, Mary Gambrell was paid to assist her

husband in the office with his job as corresponding secretary for missions. The two individuals and agencies working in tandem created a felicitous arrangement for the women, whose support had been discontinued by the same source two years earlier. Dr. Gambrell was clearly a champion of their cause, praising them often as the most diligent and dependable arm of mission work.

Every description of Mrs. Gambrell mentions her intelligence, then quickly her devotion, culture, and enterprise. Her name called forth the BWMW recording secretary's flowery best:

"Our sister secretary is small in stature [sic], but is a regular Pike's Peak when it comes to intellect. Hers is a high plane of living and action. Some of us are trying mighty hard to keep even long distance with her, for that is as near as we ever hope to get to this inimitable personality. [\[footnote\]](#)" *BS*, June 8, 1899, p. 7. Mary Gambrell probably inspired more respect than intimacy.

A minister recalled that

"[i]n the most practical part of education, culture, and refinement, she has always impressed me as a model. She may not even know it, but I have received from her some of my best ideas of music and clearest conceptions of Bible doctrine. She was by far the best Sunday-school teacher that I ever had. I found it an excellent thing for an ignorant green, timid young preacher to fall into her class. [\[footnote\]](#)" *BS*, March 3, 1898, p. 7.

Mary Gambrell's talents included writing and speaking, as well as music. The mission message that Fannie Davis's paper attempted to communicate to women was taken up by her in a woman's page in the state mission newspaper, The Missionary Messenger. In a spirit more akin to those who founded settlement houses rather than those who sought to convert the distant foreigner, she identified strongly with the downtrodden close to home. She constantly urged help for aged ministers, [\[footnote\]](#) and she became interested in all phases of the Home Mission Board's work with Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Although middle-aged and unfamiliar with the language, she learned to speak Spanish fluently, helped found a

Mexican Preacher Institute, and made her home Mexican-Baptists' home in Dallas.[\[footnote\]](#)

Texas Baptists' conscience on this issue was not raised until late in the century because they did not have a paid ministry until Reconstruction ended. See Carroll, pp. 449-455. Elliott, p. 230.

During Lou Williams' tenure as president—the decade surrounding the turn of the century—Mary Gambrell's annual reports reveal the kinds of activities women of the BMWW were continuing and adopting. The packing of "mission" or "frontier" boxes was a practice that harked back to the days of Ladies' Aid, but it was a project that Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Gambrell promoted, including the value of such boxes in the amount of total mission gifts. Reports indicated that preparing and packing a box aroused mission interest in those who had not shown such before, and the BMWW developed it into a "fine art": sending for descriptions and sizes of the orphans or missionary family, cutting and sewing new garments and bedding ("do not send anything that you would not gratefully receive yourselves")[\[footnote\]](#) and finally adding some cash or toys. Proceedings of the BMWW of Texas, 1901, p. 172.

"Bible woman" was the name given by Baptists to women missionaries who taught other women and children, but in the growth of urban areas in the 1890s, a new version of that designation was born: "Bible women" who ministered to the spiritual and temporal needs of the urban poor. In 1893 four Bible women were appointed jointly with the Sunday-school Board, one to work in Austin with Swedes, one each for Corpus Christi and El Paso to work with Mexicans, and one for Dallas to work with "the Americans." The concept was so successful that by 1903, the BMWW set a goal "where possible, to employ a Bible woman in every town."[\[footnote\]](#) Reports of their work often contained a reassurance that they confined their teaching to women and children, usually going from house to house. Proceedings of the BMWW of Texas, 1903, p. 169.

Another ministry that captured the imagination of the period was the use of a "chapel car" or "gospel car," a seventy-five-foot-long, combination travelling chapel and living quarters. The American Baptist Publication

Society donated such a railroad car named "Good Will" to Texas Baptists and outfitted its chapel with a pulpit, organ, and a full complement of their Bibles, song books, maps, charts, tracts, etc. Hollie Harper, the energetic young woman who served as woman's page editor of the Standard and as a Bible woman in Dallas, married the chapel-car minister, E. G. Townsend, and accompanied him on tours around the state in 1897-98. They held four services a day, including one prayer meeting for women that she led.

[\[footnote\]](#) Unfortunately, she died in childbirth in 1898, and for several years thereafter the presentation of her child to the women's annual meeting served as a continuing tribute to her memory. The chapel car was partially destroyed in the Galveston hurricane of 1900, and the BMWW made pledges to refurbish it. [\[footnote\]](#)

A description of the car and the ministry by Hollie H. Townsend are quoted in Mrs. W. J. J. Smith, pp. 160-62. See also BS, June 24, 1897, p. 10. Proceedings of the BMWW of Texas, 1900, p. 142.

The systematic organization of children for religious teaching with a missionary emphasis began with the spread of "Sunbeam Bands" in the 1890s. In many cases the name, which originated in Virginia, was applied to classes that already existed. By 1899 the BMWW appointed a Sunbeam superintendent to encourage and coordinate the 115 existing Texas bands and to assist in organizing more. This work developed rapidly with the early addition of "Baby Bands" and a "Young Woman's Auxiliary"; older boys' and girls' groups were eventually subdivided into "Royal Ambassadors" and "Girl's Auxiliary." The interest in education extended to the women themselves, who with publications generated by the American Baptist Publication Society and gradually by the WMU-SBC were encouraged to engage in more thorough studies of the Bible, as well as missionary topics. The growing opportunity to teach children's groups, to lead classes of other women, or to present missionary programs necessitated their having something to say.

By the end of Mrs. Williams's term of office the need for better religious education for women, particularly those who planned to serve as missionaries, had become a primary concern of WMU women all over the South. As early as 1895 Texas delegates urged the WMU to consider establishing a Missionary Training School, [\[footnote\]](#) and Kentucky women

were anxious to build one near the seminary at Louisville. But some strong SBC leaders (both male and female) opposed the idea and/or the manner in which Kentucky women took the initiative and moved ahead with the project. It was 1907 before the Women's Missionary Training School opened in Louisville, Kentucky. In the meantime Texas women worked for local Baptist schools, particularly "our Baylor" at Belton. Elli Moore, [\[footnote\]](#) an alumna, principal, and teacher of that institution, resigned from her regular duties in 1893 and canvassed the state, seeking donations from Baptists on behalf of a dream of hers: low-cost housing near the college where young women of limited means could live and share work and expenses while attending school. Her plan worked; the Cottage Home was built and proved to be a remarkable success.

A. Hunt, p. 71.

Elli Moore later married E. G. Townsend, widower of Hollie Harper Townsend. For a brief biography and description of the Cottage Home, see BS, July 11, 1895, p. 7.

In general, the projects the BWMW undertook around 1900 moved women outside the restricted sphere of their local church, its building, and its pastor and into the lives of a distant missionary family, an indigent urban mother and child, or a cooperative effort larger than their own circle could support. The Baptist Sanitorium in Dallas was one such cause; George Truett addressed the women on its possibilities at their 1904 meeting and it quickly captured their interest and support. Another was the Margaret Home, a WMU-SBC project. This was a home in Greenville, South Carolina, which provided for missionaries' children who returned to the United States to attend school. It operated for eight years and was then sold and the money used to endow WMU scholarships for the children. Other successful ventures sponsored by the WMU were the Christmas Offering for Chinese missions (later expanded to include all foreign missions) and the Week of Self-Denial, or Week of Prayer. In all these activities women were carefully maintaining their traditional, supportive role, but they were expanding the range of choices within its boundaries.

Fully as important to the BWMW as the expansion of activities undertaken during Lou Williams's presidency were the organizational changes that evolved. The percentage of reporting societies (approximately one-third)

indicates that these refinements were not pervasive, but were concentrated in the state body, in locales where there were Baptist schools, and in urban groups, particularly those in proximity to the Dallas headquarters. As models, however, they filtered down to the less well organized; in fact, this organizational efficiency was the vehicle that brought the timid, the recalcitrant, and the uninformed into the fold. Under Fannis Davis's tenure the decision had been made to name an executive committee of nine women who, along with the four officers, would conduct business between sessions, but the committee did not actually get underway until after Lou Williams took office. With both Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Gambrell residing in Dallas and most of the appointed members living in its environs, the group proved effective in transferring responsibility from single individuals (i.e., the president and the corresponding secretary). Its size was enlarged to twenty-five members in 1902. The corresponding secretary's office was combined with that of the treasurer so money would come to the source that was in most frequent contact with both the local societies and the mission boards, and the duties of all the officers and committees were defined in bylaws appended to the BWMW constitution in 1901. In a further effort to subdivide responsibility and create accountability at a level lower than the state, associational vice presidents were named in 1898 and they were urged to form associational unions of women that would meet quarterly at associational gatherings.

Probably the most influential change made in the manner of doing business was the appointment of a committee on apportionment in 1905. It was the culmination of a decade of moving away from raising money from benefits, rummage sales, suppers, etc., toward tithing (giving 10 percent of one's income) in a systematic fashion. "The most legitimate and satisfactory way to raise mission money is to go down into your pocket and give it," claimed a sister from Lindale.[\[footnote\]](#) Her motivation was not simply the unprofitability of those other ventures, but a growing denomination-wide conviction that good stewardship implied at least a tithe, "the Lord's plan of giving." This changed conception of funding from haphazard gifts to stipulated amounts that women were duty-bound to contribute, along with the creation of a sophisticated network of accountability, were innovations with wide implications for the BWMW's future. Their impact began to be

felt by 1903 when annual collections jumped nearly \$10,000 to \$23,955. By 1905, they were up to approximately \$33,750 and in 1906, \$57,800. *BS*, February 22, 1894, p. 7.

The programs given at annual meetings during the decade demonstrated the same attention to planning; for example, the 1903 meeting in Dallas had ushers, young women dressed in the native costumes of missionary fields, visitors from all important denominational boards, musical soloists, and prepared resolutions from all committees. These occasions also demonstrated a growing need to appeal to a wide range of women and to do so by utilizing symbols, catchwords, and other advertising "gimmicks." The BMWW motto ("Saved to serve") and colors (royal blue and white), adopted in 1902, were just the beginning of this trend, which, in part, contradicted the interest in content that the desire for a training school and better literature implied.

It is difficult to know how much Lou Williams contributed directly to the BMWW's development during her term of office, but it appears that her service lay in maintaining an attitude of confidence and equanimity while encouraging other women to unleash their organizational imagination and energy. The inspirational quality of her role, however, was recognized in her being referred to as "Mother" Williams until her death in 1931. Long a fixture in Texas Baptist life, she moved into the woman's training school that was eventually built in conjunction with the Baptist seminary in Fort Worth and maintained a strong interest in its landscaping.

The administration of Mary Hill Davis, 1906-20

"Gifted by nature . . . enriched by grace" and "fortunately circumstanced by time and place as one of God's own chosen messengers" was the tribute paid Mary Hill Davis when she retired in 1931 after serving twenty-five years as president of the Texas WMU.[\[footnote\]](#) It accurately describes the conviction of Baptist women that she was born to lead them into the dawning of God's new day, a future of which she so grandly and frequently spoke in vivid oratorical style. As recording secretary under Lou Williams's presidency from 1898 to 1906, she displayed energetic leadership and literary skill so effectively that she was the overwhelming choice to succeed that "noble woman to whom she was bound with singular devotion."

[\[footnote\]](#) Taking the helm of an institution whose detractors were finally pacified and whose organizational apparatus was in order conceptually, if not actually, she provided a blend of administrative skill and inspiration that by 1920 had increased the number of local societies by a multiple of five and the amount of contributions by twelve. Within a decade of her assuming office, a woman wrote in the Baptist Standard (and was not contradicted): "It is conceded that no part of our work is better organized than is the work of Baptist women."[\[footnote\]](#)

Mrs. W. J. J. Smith, quoting a tribute made by Willie T. Dawson in 1928.

Ibid.

BS, January 20, 1916, p. 14.

Mary Hill was born in Georgia, but came to Dallas in 1870 when still a small child. She was a lifelong member of First Baptist Church. She married a physician, F. S. Davis, and had one son who also became a doctor. A comfortable life that included servants and a three-story brick home afforded her the opportunity to give her prodigious talents and energy to volunteer work, as did thousands of other women of her generation who, as members of churches and club federations, were an important force in America's social and cultural life. Mrs. Davis was darkly handsome and displays a confident, penetrating gaze in her portraits. Often described in terms of a queen, she was "by all accounts, a charming woman."[\[footnote\]](#) Her annual addresses were considered literary gems by Texas Baptists and were published as Living Messages.

I. Hunt, p. 33.

The twenty-five-year-old organization of which Mary Davis assumed leadership had grown from 12 to 350 societies and its annual collections from \$35 to over \$50,000, but its transformation had barely kept pace with the rapid changes in Texas life in general. The discovery of oil and the demographic shift to urban centers were changes of a magnitude to make history books, but everyday existence on an individual scale had been altered in equally significant ways. Those twenty-five years had brought gas and electrical energy to many homes, providing light, refrigeration, and other remarkable conveniences. Telephones had become commonplace and automobiles were on their way.

In an attempt to keep abreast of organizational advances, the BWMW decided early in the century to adopt an apportionment method of providing for budgetary demands. (The WMU-SBC had begun using such a plan in 1895 in order to give each state a goal for its annual collections.) The BWMW added expenditures for state projects to its WMU apportionment and divided the total proportionally among the associational unions. The plan immediately began to raise the amount of collections, part of that rise being attributable to the addition of a collection agent in closer contact with the local society than was the state corresponding secretary-treasurer. The plan was naturally most effective in areas where associational unions were strong, but there were still many scattered women's groups without such affiliation, particularly in sparsely populated areas of the state. In addition, the seventy-four associational unions functioning by 1908 became an unwieldy number for the corresponding secretary-treasurer to oversee. A committee recommended, therefore, that the state be divided into twelve districts whose boundaries would follow the lines of congressional districts, and upon Mary Gambrell's proposal to the convention, the plan was adopted. Elli Moore Townsend took a leave from Baylor College and spent 1909-10 helping the districts organize. All district presidents were named and in place at the 1910 meeting for the first time, and collections showed a rise to \$77,731.70.

The real impact of district organization came in 1911, the Silver Anniversary celebration of the consolidation of the conventions, when Texas women gave over \$112,000 for mission causes. By 1914 the amount was over \$200,000 and reached \$385,000 by 1919. As Mrs. Stokes of the

Southwest District expressed it: "If you know what is expected of you, it is much easier to bring it to pass."[\[footnote\]](#) In 1914 the district presidents were made state vice-presidents, and in 1919 their number was increased from twelve to eighteen when congressional districts were redivided. *BS*, February 22, 1912, p. 14.

Although Mary Gambrell helped devise the district plan and saw it near completion, her rather sudden death in 1911 left another to refine and execute it. Addie Buckner Beddow, who had served as Mrs. Gambrell's assistant and knew the work intimately, stepped into her unfilled term and was subsequently elected to serve as corresponding secretary-treasurer for thirteen years. Possessed with impeccable Baptist credentials (she was the daughter of R. C. Buckner, founder of the orphanage and longtime president of the BGCT; her husband, who was both a minister and a doctor, served as principal to the Buckner Orphan Home school; one son was a medical missionary to China and another was a minister), Addie Beddow did not project the charisma of either of her predecessors, Mina Everett and Mary Gambrell. She served faithfully and efficiently in an important phase of the BMWU's life, but her personality is not conveyed with many details or much color. She let her financial reports speak for her, preferring to interpret the wishes and plans of a more vivid president and executive committee.[\[footnote\]](#) Elliott, p. 232.

Addie Beddow's efficiency was thoroughgoing, and she immediately devised a Record Book containing four years' quarterly reports for each society's use. The Standard carried her repeated, long articles giving explicit instructions on how to fill them out and to whom to send copies.[\[footnote\]](#) Her reports to the convention of her own activities included the number of miles travelled, conferences held, talks made, letters written, envelopes mailed, books sent, etc. In this, of course, she was not untypical of a Baptist officer, just an extraordinarily good one. An example is *BS*, February 29, 1912, p. 14.

The southwide WMU was the source of many ideas on methods and efficiency which the states adapted to their own use, as Texas had the apportionment plan. The Standard of Excellence was another of the WMU's

recommendations; Texas adopted it in 1911. An individual society was rated and assigned a letter grade based on these criteria:

1. one meeting a month with a devotional exercise and missionary program,
 2. a 25% increase in membership each year,
 3. a 16% increase in gifts over the preceding year's total,
 4. regular quarterly reports sent to state officers,
 5. a denominational publication subscribed for each home represented in the organization,
 6. observance of special seasons of prayer for missions,
 7. a mission study class,
 8. average attendance of a number equal to two-thirds of the membership
- .[\[footnote\]](#)

Minutes of BWMW of Texas, 1911, pp. 197-98.

The WMU also introduced a Manual of Methods in 1917 which the BWMW taught at encampments and training institutes. These sessions included lectures, drills in parliamentary law, and exams, the successful completion of which entitled one to an Efficiency Certificate. WMU yearbooks designated a theme for each month's mission study and a special object of prayer; after 1917, a Bible study topic was listed. Standardization also modified the names of Baptist women's groups: "Baptist Women Mission Workers" was discarded in 1919 in favor of "Woman's Missionary Union," a designation the SBC women had borrowed from Fannie Davis's 1880 organization of Texas Baptist State Convention women. Other states, at all levels of organization, adopted the same label. The initials "WMU" became synonymous with Baptist women.

These carefully explained standards and specifically delineated goals created a smoothly run network wherein information and currency could be passed forward and backward from the SBC Executive Board to a WMU circle within a local church. The Southern Baptist boards would request from the WMU a certain annual amount for specific projects and for a percentage of their total budget; the WMU added the cost of its own projects to that amount and apportioned it to the states. The BWMW added to their WMU total the amount requested of them by the BGCT and the

costs of their discrete commitments, then apportioned that total to the districts. Districts divided their requests and passed them on proportionally to associational auxiliaries, who allotted their totals to women in specific churches. As large urban congregations developed, the plan was enlarged to include subdividing a congregation into circles that met three times a month separately and once for a churchwide program. Separate collections were also taken during the year for specific projects at each administrative level. (State districts and associational auxiliaries functioned primarily as communication facilitators. Meetings were held at those levels, but projects rarely originated there.)

A competitive spirit developed over a group's meeting or exceeding its apportionment. Following the WMU meeting in St. Louis in 1913, Mary Davis reported that "Texas advanced a step, taking third place in the list of States, Virginia and Georgia only outstripping us, but we serve notice right now that we are in the race to win, and are going to do our best to go ahead next year."[\[footnote\]](#) This spirit prevailed in 1919 when the SBC requested the WMU to "shift its financial plans" to join in a five-year campaign to raise \$75,000,000 to retire denominational debts and to enlarge all its programs.[\[footnote\]](#) The *BS*, October 16, 1913, p. 14.

Norman W. Cox, ed., *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), II, 1518. This article on WMU was written by Juliette Mather, Young People's Secretary, WMU-SBC, 1921-48.

southwide WMU accepted \$15,000,000 as its quota, as did Texas. The BWMW met that year in Houston and Addie Beddoe reported \$385,844.19 in receipts. In view of the Seventy-five Million Campaign she suggested that Texas women aim for \$635,000 in 1920. No sooner had the campaign gotten underway with an intense Victory Week promotion than a financial depression unsettled businesses and banks all over the country; prices dropped on cotton, cattle, and oil. When the women met in El Paso in 1920, however, they had not only met their goal, they exceeded it by \$60,000. The Texas WMU reported gifts of \$708,123.99 in 1920 and over \$906,000 in 1921.[\[footnote\]](#)

Although the Seventy-five Million Campaign eventually netted the SBC only about \$58,000,000, WMU overpaid its quota by more than \$25,000.

See A. Hunt, p. 106.

It would be incorrect to imply that these sums were collected solely—even primarily—to meet quotas. When one district or state met its pledge, the whole group appeared to share in the success of their common cause and would rise to sing, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." The quotas were raised and met by holding before the women the goals of their organization—missions, education, and benevolence—and devising projects that fulfilled those aims. Missions were the first cause of WMU and their definition gradually broadened to include every form of evangelism, including the local and personal. Missionaries present at annual meetings were always honored, and they often gave addresses and led devotionals. The practice became common for Texas's foreign missionaries to plan their visits home around the SBC meeting in May or the BGCT in November. During Mary Davis's tenure as president of the BWMW, one of the most visible of these was Annie Jenkins Sallee, a Waco native and Baylor University graduate who served briefly as a state organizer before going to China in 1906. She had many family ties with prominent Texas denominational figures. In 1908, her sister, Georgia Jenkins, presented to the BWMW the need for a school for girls in Kaifeng, China, and asked that \$3,000 in gold be pledged to build it. The amount was exceeded by \$23.[\[footnote\]](#)

Report of the Proceedings of BWMW of Texas, 1908, p. 202.

The school for Chinese girls satisfied not only a mission goal, but centered on another growing issue among Texas Baptist women: education. Texas promoted and supported the opening of the religious training school for women in Louisville, Kentucky; but R. C. Buckner, Lou Williams, and others sustained the dream of such a school in Texas. When Southwestern Seminary opened in Fort Worth in 1910 and the BWMW was approached to build a dormitory there to house young women while they studied religious subjects and trained to be missionaries, the women pledged \$50,000 to do so. This "Woman's Temple to Missions" was not finished until 1915 and the price had inflated to \$105,000, but the funds were furnished. It stood as satisfying testimony to the belief that "Texas Baptist womanhood counts nothing too good for the preparation of our young women for the noblest of tasks, that of Christian service."[\[footnote\]](#) The BWMW awarded

scholarships to Training School girls and appointed three women to serve in an advisory capacity to the Board of Directors of the Seminary. Proceedings of the BWMW of Texas, 1915, p. 236.

The education of children and young adults continued to be a successful feature of women's work. A Juvenile (Sunbeam) Superintendent had been added to the BWMW in 1899; in 1910, Young Woman's Superintendent was made an official position. The number of age-graded bands increased rapidly, likely because it was a work with which women felt comfortable. Training institutes and detailed instructions provided by the state leaders boosted the morale and confidence of those who undertook mission training of children.

Benevolent work and a variety of traditional women's activities not specifically classified as missions or education were officially recognized as a feature of the BWMW in 1909 when a department of Personal Service was added to the organization to foster those activities. The director solicited reports from members of societies to encourage their "Christian witnessing." A typical one asked:

"How many visits: to the sick____, to the needy____ to shutins____, to prisoners____, to hospitals____ and to county homes____? How many tracts given____, Bibles____? How many positions have you secured for those out of work____? How many garments sewn or given to the poor____? How many groceries given to the needy____?[\[footnote\]](#)"

R. G. Commander, The Story of the Union Baptist Association, 1840-1976 (Houston: D. Armstrong, Publisher, 1977), p. 163.

Opportunities to enhance one's numerical assessment on such a form were increased during World War I when Baptist women were encouraged to participate in Red Cross work and other patriotic endeavors. R. G. Commander recalls that the Houston WMU "organized and provided some social life for the young men" who were stationed at Ellington Field and Camp Logan (near present-day Memorial Park).[\[footnote\]](#) Ibid., p. 164.

While quotas and efficiency standards had not replaced religious faith and zeal as the primary motivation of Texas Baptist women by 1920, the

proportion of time and interest given to them is indisputable. These data were a major focus of most programs, articles, and reports. Once women's successful experience with standards, goals, and apportionments convinced them they could train the timid, account for the recalcitrant, and win denominational (male) approval, they gave themselves with fervor to creating program guides, statistical charts, watchwords and slogans, collection devices, and an endless round of jubilees, anniversaries, and significant-sounding names or catchy labels. In so doing, they began to relish administrative tasks and the sense of worth the compilation of figures and programs conveyed, fashioning for themselves an organizational system that existed alongside their biblical fundamentalism, threatening at times to obscure if not supplant it.

As president of this developing administrative model, Mary Davis operated rather like a Chief Executive Officer—identifying competent people to assist her, meeting regularly with officers to account for progress and consolidate plans, staying abreast of denominational developments, and serving as a model and inspiration for the group.

She was the ideal leader for a growing Baptist bureaucracy: a combination of orator and executive.

Mrs. Davis revitalized the woman's department of the Baptist Standard, which had been reduced to a page of reprints (primarily pious poetry, moral tales, and household hints) following Hollie Harper Townsend's death and Mary Gambrell's opting for The Missionary Worker as her publishing forum, and utilized it to convey the personal and spiritual dimension of the BWMW's programs, meetings, and reports. But she communicated most effectively and memorably in her addresses, which J. M. Carroll described as "strong, statesmanlike, and prophetic."[\[footnote\]](#) She spoke in an effulgent, oratorical style that upheld "the stainless flag of King Emmanuel," "the dignity and blessedness of motherhood and the preciousness of childhood."[\[footnote\]](#) Clearly civilization was entering "a new dispensation and embracing a new freedom,"[\[footnote\]](#) in which Baptists—Baptist women, in particular—would play a preeminent role through their missionary efforts. Her vision of missions encompassed "a glorious comprehension of the risen Lord's scheme of redemption, which

left out not one soul that was ever to be born in all the earth"[\[footnote\]](#) and called for whatever toil or method accomplished its grand purpose. "We are small detachments of a great army," she explained, but we should never lose sight of the "great battlefield" on which we struggle.

Carroll, p. 863. Note that these adjectives are both masculine and complementary.

Proceedings of the BWMW of Texas, 1915, pp. 185, 186.

Minutes of BWMW of Texas, 1909, pp. 179-80.

Report of the Proceedings of BWMW of Texas, 1908, p. 179.

"What you can do may be limited and trivial when viewed by itself; but, remember, it can never be viewed in itself. It is more than itself, just as a thread in a web is more than a thread, and a link in a chain is more than a link. It is a bit of the whole, and the whole is immense, glorious, and eternal."[\[footnote\]](#)"

Proceedings of WMU of Texas, 1920, p. 7.

She used numerous metaphors to relate the bigness and complexity of the new order to a single individual's effort, integrating a religious world conquest with the power of "one person, one woman" making "heart to heart, face to face" contact.[\[footnote\]](#)

Minutes of BWMW of Texas, 1909, p. 181.

By 1920—still midstream in the course of Mary Hill Davis's career—the Texas WMU had firmly established its success and developed some aspects of administrative expertise far beyond the BGCT or the SBC. Women found that the establishment of a volunteer network and attention to details were their forte and that the resulting financial and personal gains were sufficient to maintain organizational momentum and to win an undisputed place in the denomination hierarchy. They were able to accept the fact that their position was an "auxiliary" one not only on the basis of tradition, but also under the particular circumstances of working toward a grand ideal. The scope and significance of their religious cause gave their tasks meaning and made them part of an integrated whole. Standing up for what they conceived to be eternal verities gave a sense of dignity and urgency to their efforts. Another explanation for the mantle of dependency resting so lightly on their shoulders was the fact that an intimate, informal network still operated

among Baptists in Texas; relationships were still based on a family model rather than an economic one, and traditional, if indirect means of influence between sexes were effective. As Mary Davis admitted in an editorial footnote: "They [the men] seem very much to need us . . . and we need them—a little."[\[footnote\]](#) Women's talents probably developed with more facility in segregated institutions than they would have in an integrated setting. They extended their possibilities within the boundaries of social feminism, which were the boundaries accepted by most of the culture. Real equality continued to elude them, in part, by their becoming so absorbed in methodological details that they sacrificed (or did not cultivate) theological content and so anxious to maintain the good will of the men that they remained apart from controversy. Ultimately, power among Baptists rests in those who address those arenas: biblical doctrine and politics.

BS, October 16, 1913, p. 14. To give just a few examples of the way key Texas Baptists, both male and female, were accessible to one another in informal, sometimes familial relationships: Lou Williams, Mary H. Davis, Mary and James Gambrell, and J. B. Cranfill were members of George Truett's First Baptist Church in Dallas; Truett was married to a sister of Annie Jenkins Sallee, the missionary; the women's father, Judge W. H. Jenkins, was a long-term trustee of Baylor University and deacon at First Baptist Church in Waco, pastorate of B. H. Carroll; J. M. Carroll, the minister and historian, was B. H. Carroll's brother. J. B. Cranfill gives a backstage view of his communication with Lou Williams's husband and with Mary Davis prior to George Truett's call to serve as minister of their church. See J. B. Cranfill, *From Memory* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1937), pp. 201-02.

Introduction

In the two decades on either side of 1900, Texas Baptist women enlarged the range of their activities most significantly in the creation of a successful mission-support organization. Within its programs they developed abilities to lead worship services, preside over public meetings, build efficient group structures, promote organizational expansion, and raise large sums of money. All of these skills were applicable to other aspects of Baptist work and worship, but their transfer was problematic. Hindering women's entering more fully into all parts of denominational life were the entrenchment of an exclusively male leadership and the biblical prohibition against females' "usurping authority" in settings that included both sexes. At the same time, however, their inclusion was encouraged by the general cultural expansion of women's role and by the church's demand for additional talent to facilitate its evangelistic enterprise.

Chapter Two dealt with the rationalization—based-primarily on a literal translation of the Bible, with emphasis on the New Testament—that accompanied this confrontation of cultural change and traditional restraint. Chapter Three detailed the way transformations in role were interpreted by Baptist women in the development of the Woman's Missionary Union, the all-female missionary society. Chapter Four will explore other aspects of religious life, those in which the sexes were integrated, or in which women sought to be included: worship, administration, benevolence, and education, both within the local church and in the mission field. In each category, the extent and/or limitation of change in women's participation between 1880 and 1920 will be discussed.

Local Church

Local church. The center of Baptist faith lies in the heart of the individual believer; the denomination has a weak theological basis for forming institutions. Of the several large active fellowships into which Baptists paradoxically join, only one is thought to be essential, based on biblical directive and example: a local congregation of the church. A primary function of this body is to bring like-minded people together for worship, which includes the proclamation of the gospel, singing, prayer, the observance of the Lord's Supper, and the recognition of new Christians by confession of faith and baptism.[\[footnote\]](#)

Historically Baptists have practiced other ordinances of worship (love-feasts, laying on of hands, feet-washing, the holy kiss, the right hand of fellowship, the dedication of infants and anointing of the sick), but these had fallen into disuse or had been abbreviated by mainstream Southern Baptists in the late nineteenth century.

Women's place in Southern Baptist worship services was described in a 1977 analysis by James and Marti Hefley as that of a "discriminated majority." "By preference of the men who run things, the women are to be seen modestly dressed in church and not heard," the Hefleys explained, concluding that "about all women do [is] pray among themselves and collect money for missionaries."[\[footnote\]](#) The authors are correct about Baptist women's faithful attendance and about their comprising a majority of the congregation, if somewhat short-sighted about their contribution to the service.

James and Marti Hefley, *The Church That Produced a President* (New York: Wyden Books/Simon and Schuster, 1977), pp. 114, 116. This book was a response to Jimmy Carter's election to the presidency.

Although Baptist women have always been visible in the local church as worshipers, their level of participation has varied. The earliest Baptists—left-wing English Protestants—were thought heretical for their extreme doctrines of personal liberty and congregational autonomy; some of them embraced total freedom in the Holy Spirit and elevated the rights of the laity to such an extent that women preached and served as deaconesses (ordained church officers or ministers). Particularly was this true during the

1600s when the conflict between state and free churches was most intense. During the 1700s, women were not as likely to take public roles, and they were even less likely to do so in the 1800s.[\[footnote\]](#) By that time the denomination had moved closer to the center of the culture and the culture defined women's proper sphere in terms of Queen Victoria's prim, maternal model.

Leon McBeth, *Women in Baptist Life* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), pp. 28-37.

Baptists in the United States represented both Arminian and Calvinistic wings of the Reformed tradition; in the South, "General" Baptists held to free-will convictions and "Particular" Baptists stood firmly for Calvinistic theology. By the mid-eighteenth century the latter group had prevailed in imposing the discipline and order of their tradition on the oldest congregations in the middle colonies and along the southern coast. These groups, who became known as "Regular" Baptists, generally limited the church functions of women to voting and giving their testimony of conversion.[\[footnote\]](#)

Ibid., pp. 39-40.

The designation "Regular" was assumed to distinguish these more traditional Baptists from the "irregularity" of Separate Baptists who began colonizing the southern frontier after 1755. The original Separate Baptists migrated to North Carolina following the first Great Awakening, and their enthusiastic doctrines spread rapidly, eventually having a strong influence on the style and theology adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention when it formed in 1845. [\[footnote\]](#) The worship of Separate Baptists was noted for zeal and emotion and incorporated as part of its noisy, uninhibited services an "extensive ministry of women," including their praying aloud and preaching. [\[footnote\]](#) Martha Stearns Marshall, one of their foremost female preachers, was described as "a lady of good sense, singular piety and surprising elocution, who in countless instances melted a whole concourse into tears by her prayer and exhortations."[\[footnote\]](#)

William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations in the South* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1961), pp. 158-162.

Robert A. Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and its People, 1607-1972* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1974), p. 49.

Robert Baylor Semple, *History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia* (Richmond, Virginia, 1810), p. 374; quoted in Garnett H. Ryland, *The Baptists of Virginia, 1699-1926* (Richmond: The Virginia Board of Missions and Education, 1955), p. 40.

Just as the initial participation of Baptist women in England was tempered by the denomination's rising social status and a cultural definition of femininity that excluded aggressiveness, the activity of Baptist women in the South declined in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The back-country Separate Baptists began uniting with the respectable Regular Baptists of the cities for cooperative efforts after the Revolution, and women generally ceased speaking out in worship, deferring to the leadership of males. Some women continued as deaconesses, but that office lost its ordained status and became a natural extension of private nurturing identified with the female sex. Since congregational autonomy and varied social customs prevailed, especially on the frontier, these were merely trends regarding Baptist women's behavior rather than uniformly accepted creeds. Where emotional fervor and informality characterized worship services, as in the camp meeting revivals of the early 1800s, some women continued to be vocal "as convert-exhorters, or as good singers and praying persons."[\[footnote\]](#) Women's public role in worship, however, was largely eliminated in the nineteenth century by the establishment of order and cooperation among Baptists of the South and by their negative reaction to feminine activism as demonstrated in the abolition and woman's suffrage movements.

Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1974), p. 86.

After the Civil War, when the issue of women's missionary societies introduced afresh the debate over the proper role of women in Southern Baptist circles, the passivity and silence that had become dominant as the nineteenth-century model for women were promoted as the traditional pattern for Christian women since biblical times. Examples of women preaching a sermon or praying with a penitent sinner, accepted by many Baptists less than a century before, had been forgotten or were repressed as embarrassing mistakes of unlearned forebears. The men who served as

pastors, presided over denominational councils, taught in seminaries, and wrote religious commentaries claimed biblical command and natural law had established the patriarchal dominance that existed. One of these nineteenth-century traditionalists, Dr. J. H. Spencer, commented frequently in the Baptist Standard as late as the 1890s on women's place in worship:

"I do not see how a statement could be plainer or more direct: "Let your women keep silence in the churches." Is not this sufficiently explicit? Does God mean what he here says? If you, reader, were going to teach that women should keep silence in the churches, how would you express it more plainly and explicitly? . . ." "Women have not all the privileges or responsibilities that men have in any department of life. Neither have men all the privileges or responsibilities that women have. God lays burdens upon his creatures according to their capacity to bear them and employs them in pursuits to which they are adapted. On men he imposes the rougher tasks of life, for which their strength, courage and powers of physical endurance fits them; on women the lighter, but not less needful tasks to which their superior skill, tenderness, gentleness and modesty adapt them. In the church, men teach, preach the gospel, exhort, lead in public prayer, administer ordinances, preside over business meetings, make and second motions, engage in debate and take the vote. None of these duties or rights. . . belong to women.[\[footnote\]](#)"

Baptist Standard (Waco), February 18, 1897, p. 3. Hereinafter in these notes this publication will be referred to as "BS."

For woman was reserved a quiet, supportive role, one that did not call for her to "make a public exhibition of herself in the church." Since Dr. Spencer believed that "woman's greatest happiness in this life [arose] from a consciousness of being tenderly loved" and that she won that love by being modest and refined rather than "repulsively bold and masculine," these restrictions were for her own good.[\[footnote\]](#)

Ibid.

In most cases, Baptist women in the early period of this study (1880-90) also believed that their sphere was distinctly separate from men's and did not include a leading role in public worship. They acknowledged the authority of men; even when they argued for wider participation for

themselves, they conceived that permission for such had to be granted by men. Lost from their tradition were the examples of women who were free to obey the impulses of the Spirit in worship. Their version of "the good old days of our mothers" were of times when women's work was restricted to "keeping a home, nursing the sick, and attending church."

[\[footnote\]](#) Attending church meant just that: being quietly and modestly present with hearts open to faith and trust. One writer went so far in her emphasis on the passive aspect of woman's role in worship that she dismissed all need for mental vigor: "[Woman's] life in the kingdom is not to construct thoughts, theories, dogma, and distinctions, but to execute in the name of the Lord the will of the Lord in simple faith and loving obedience." [\[footnote\]](#) The execution spoken of—"applied Christianity"—was woman's rightful place in the kingdom and was to be carried on outside worship, in everyday acts of kindness and compassion.

BS, July 15, 1897, p. 10.

BS, November 5, 1914, p. 14.

Despite the emphasis on women's submission—even silence—during worship, there was general acknowledgement that their presence at church was essential, that they assumed an importance beyond serving as followers and pew-fillers. This recognition was often couched in patronizing language, depicting the repression of women as if it were, in fact, elevation, but it also conveyed a real conviction that the church could not exist without women:

"Woman is the life of the church, because she is usually there; the hope of the church because of her ardor and zeal; the strength because of her purity and devotion. . . . The church needs a woman's holy prayer, a woman's loving tear, a woman's gentle hand and all the mentionless riches of a woman's faithful heart." [\[footnote\]](#)

BS, March 19, 1896, p. 14.

Pastor M. V. Smith expressed amazement at the faithfulness of women in spite of unequal arrangements:

"Tho [sic] the apostles and preachers were all selected from the men, tho [sic] the Holy Spirit inspired men only to write the books of the Bible, old and new, and the pastors and deacons were all men, and the ordinances of

God's house were to be administered by men, yet in the face of all this, women have crowded the house of God to hear the ministry of men, predominated as to number at our prayer meetings, made the best teachers in our Sunday schools and have never hesitated in following the leadings of the Holy Spirit, calling their sons and husbands to foreign fields." "Think of a church without a woman. Think of a mission among the heathen with no Christian woman to counsel and no mother, wife or sister or daughter on the ground to show by her patience, wisdom, sympathy and self-sacrifice what the gospel has done and purposes to do. . . .[\[footnote\]](#)"
BS, March 4, 1897, p. 1.

Another writer explained that subordination in worship services sometimes followed or preceded a dominant role without:

"The ladies of the [Houston] church seem to have made the first move towards a revival of interest in the services. They undertook to repair the church building. . . .In 1868 the house was renovated and painted, and there was a manifest revival of interest among the brethren.[\[footnote\]](#)"
B. F. Fuller, *History of Texas Baptists* (Louisville, Ky.: Baptist Book Concern, n.d.), p. 370.

In the late nineteenth century Baptist women did not chafe unduly at their limitations in worship. Their primary attack on orthodoxy concerned their right to organize mission societies and to take part in evangelization. Only secondarily, when worship prohibitions and practices thwarted those goals, did they seek a more active role. Since, even then, they accepted the concept of separate spheres for the sexes, they made no organized efforts to change worship patterns. The changes came inadvertently as a result of their developing skills in the women's organization and "small works" assigned them and applying those talents naturally in sexually integrated settings.

Given the legalistic, biblically literal mind-set of the Southern Baptist establishment at the time, every increment of change in women's participation in worship was argued against the "bottom line" of absolute silence. That standard, of course, was irrelevant; it had never been strictly adhered to in any period of Baptist history and certainly was not in the Texas of the 1880s and 1890s. But it was invariably posed by someone

when questions of women's appropriate service were raised. Sometimes it was recognized for what it was: "'The injunction to silence' could not forbid the use of words in any form of utterance, for that would conflict with prayer and prophesying, which were the result of the Holy Spirit's presence. . .the hostility of some men to women's active gospel works looks a little like envy and jealousy rather than stern regard for theories of inspiration and Scriptural prohibition." [\[footnote\]](#)

Norman W. Cox, ed., *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), II, 1508.

The most obvious challenge to silence was women's singing. Not only did they sing, women were principals in choirs and they played the organ and piano. A female soloist rendering a soul-stirring sacred song became a popular feature of Baptist worship services and religious programs. This kind of "special music" was probably introduced first at women's meetings and in more secular settings like denominational school programs, then utilized effectively in worship services as those services became more planned and less spontaneous. The identification of women with music became so accepted that women were often given the leadership in this element of worship. With no apology a man reported in 1903, "Wife and I engaged in a protracted meeting at Falls City, Texas, the second Sunday in August—that is, I was the preacher and she had in charge the music [sic]."

Although one minister felt compelled in 1896 to argue that women's singing was acceptable only because it was not teaching or assuming authority over a man, [\[footnote\]](#) that was a rare defense for an unquestioned practice. And as defense it was inadequate: most of the gospel hymns—the ones that were not sentimental and "inspirational"—were written specifically to be instructive, to present biblical truths to common people in a memorable format. [\[footnote\]](#) In direct repudiation of his reasoning was the appearance around the turn of the century of "evangelistic singers," members of traveling teams who set the tone and reinforced the message of the evangelist. The services of one such singer were advertised in the summer of 1914: ". . .Mrs. Anna Ellis Dexter, voice teacher in the Academy [San Marcos], is to spend the vacation singing in revival meetings. With all my heart I do commend Mrs. Dexter as a Christian lady of rare culture and a singer of remarkable power. She will help wherever she may be engaged."

[\[footnote\]](#) Just as the continued dominance of men in preaching stemmed, in part, from an irrational preference among Baptists for the sound of a man's speaking voice, there existed a similar preference for woman's musicianship that effectively side-stepped any legalistic objection to her exercising that gift. Baptist women were allowed to "preach" melodically long before they could in spoken voice.

BS, February 20, 1896, p. 3.

See discussion in John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805* (Lexington, Ky.: The University Press of Kentucky, 1972), pp. 121-124. Although the results of American popular hymnody were not as artistically meritorious as the sculpture and stained glass of medieval cathedrals, the motivation behind them was the same.

BS, June 18, 1914, p. 12.

The movement toward the establishment of denominational order during the nineteenth century had more effect on the right of women to pray and to testify in worship than on their performing music. Baptists, like other left-wing Protestants, based membership on a person's conversion; time-honored practice required that the believer relate his or her "Christian experience" before the church, answer questions posed by the congregation, then after the members gave their vote of approval, submit to baptism by immersion.[\[footnote\]](#) In the general reaction against women asserting themselves following the Civil War, some men advocated that a woman's testimony be given only once and be limited to brief answers to or affirmation of statements framed by the pastor. "If she gets up on ordinary occasions of public worship and delivers a speech—calling it her experience—before a mixed audience, she violates a divine command, and, of course, sins against God," explained Dr. Spencer with his characteristic conservatism. [\[footnote\]](#) But Texas Baptists were not generally that restrictive. Their conviction that the composition and continued life of the church was based on just such a witness of God's action in an individual's life and their fear of inhibiting the work of the Holy Spirit led them to encourage women to make their own confessional statements. Because the right to sing was rarely addressed, this public action of women in worship was the clearest example to them that a compromise with silence was necessary and defensible. The example of daughters prophesying in Acts 2 proved to them that women's lips "were not to be hermetically sealed." An

editorial statement made in the *Baptist Standard* in 1897 refuted Dr. Spencer and outlined common practice in Texas:
William W. Sweet, *Religion on the Frontier: The Baptists, 1783-1830* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1931), pp. 52-53.
BS, June 24, 1897, p. 7.

"If a woman may tell her experience when she joins the church—and this is a universal custom among Baptists—she may tell her experience at the next Wednesday night prayer meeting. . . .If a woman has a hope in Christ she should ever be ready to give a reason therefor, and this carries with it the right to tell her experience more than once.[\[footnote\]](#)"
BS, January 21, 1897, p. 5.

By the turn of the century, women were beginning to take other minor speaking roles in worship; namely, praying publicly and prophesying, the latter defined as "edifying, exhorting, and giving comfort."[\[footnote\]](#) These practices were defended along the same lines as was woman's right to witness to her conversion; sometimes they were referred to as her Christian "duty" as well as her "right." "Women [are] undoubtedly members of the church. The whole church ought to come together and prophesy. That undoubtedly includes the women. . ." argued one writer.[\[footnote\]](#) A fear of quenching the Spirit by discouraging its work among women was beginning to be a concern, even if less one than the continued need to maintain women's position of subjection. The tension between these two is evident in a 1903 article on "Room for the Women":
BS, October 30, 1913, p. 18.
Ibid.

"Many Baptists think a woman ought not to speak nor work publicly under any circumstances; but the word of God teaches that they ought to be permitted to do all they can for the cause of our Master. Of course I don't mean to turn the ministry over to women. But let them do all they can, and let us give them all the encouragement we can.[\[footnote\]](#)"
BS, April 9, 1903, p. 10.

Women rarely voiced what role they specifically wanted for themselves in worship; they limited their statements to generalized longings "for wider fields and larger opportunities"[\[footnote\]](#) or feelings that "divine love and

wisdom have definitely settled the question of woman's duty and placed the seal of approval upon her service of love."[\[footnote\]](#) They were predictably confused by contradictory calls to service and submission.

BS, January 7, 1897, n.p.

BS, June 18, 1903, p. 10.

In the 1910s a new orthodoxy was formulated, and it has persevered through most of the twentieth century. Women were encouraged to answer God's call in every aspect of the church's life, but were reassured that by biblical example, he would never call them to the ministry. Tedious use of proof-texts to determine how much sound from a woman's voice still constituted "silence" gave way to a general scriptural guideline of orderly worship services in which women took assisting roles. A 1916 Baptist Standard editorial admitted that the question of women speaking in public had become a social rather than a scriptural issue. It deplored "the absurdity of placing dogmatic interpretations on isolated passages of Scripture, wholly detached from any consideration of the spirit of the New Testament and from circumstances or environment" and asserted that an ideal in harmony with the spirit of the New Testament was a time "when there would be no unjust discrimination against women."[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, August 3, 1916, p. 6.

The issue of women's role in worship, aside from the ordained ministry, had become a social issue, but the Baptist social milieu still reinforced strict limitations. This was primarily accomplished in two ways: the movement toward formalized, less-spontaneous services, especially in large urban churches where women were most likely to be trained for public roles, and the restriction of church administration to males. In the increasingly well-planned services (particularly the Sunday-morning worship hour), prayers and officiating were no longer left to chance or to the minister, but were assigned to the officers and leading men of the church; therefore, since women were not officers, they rarely had speaking parts in "formal" worship services. The deacons (all men) traditionally administered the Lord's Supper and assisted the pastor with respondents to the "invitation." Even when congregational size and foresight increased the need for worship assistants with no particular scriptural qualifications—ushers and persons who passed collection plates or made announcements—social propriety

dictated that men take the roles.^[footnote] Order and respectability kept women silenced and seated in worship nearly as effectively in the twentieth century as scriptural prohibitions did in the nineteenth.

Black Baptist churches established the tradition of women making announcements related to community life, even though they sometimes made them from the floor rather than from the pulpit.

Despite the restrictions that manners and tradition continued to place on women's leadership in worship, there was a definite change after the turn of the century in favor of her theoretical right to participate vocally and in her actually exercising that privilege at all-female meetings and informal gatherings of the church. As described in Chapter Two, a hermeneutical shift from the legalistic application of Bible verses favoring feminine repression to an emphasis on the egalitarian principles behind New Testament theology justified the change. This did not mean, however, that Baptist males either relinquished their authority or shared it equally with women. They maintained their exclusive position on the powerful end of the denominational spectrum by insisting that Christian liberty did not include women's ordination to the ministry.

Throughout the period of this study, nearly every discussion of change in "woman's sphere" included a denial that women wanted to or could serve as pastors. When men discussed the subject, they usually used a biblical basis for their objection: "Paul wrote: 'But I suffer not a woman to be a bishop or pastor of a church.'"^[footnote] Sometimes they were less definite with chapter and verse, but still claimed scriptural authority for their position: "Our own view of the matter is that our women are not to be licensed or ordained as preachers, since the Scriptures furnish us neither precept nor example for such procedure."^[footnote] Others brought the weight of Baptist scholarship to bear on the issue, particularly that of Dr. John A. Broadus, professor and president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, whose pamphlet, "Ought Women to Speak in Mixed Public Assemblies," presented a strong negative position and helped define Southern Baptist reaction and policy in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.^[footnote] Another frequently used argument in favor of women's exclusion was fear that the ministry was an impossible responsibility for her to combine with her duties to family:

BS, October 22, 1903, p. 3.

BS, January 21, 1897, p. 5.

In the BS, August 8, 1895, p. 4, Dr. Broadus' son-in-law, Dr. A. T.

Roberson, indicated that in a revision of the pamphlet made by Dr. Broadus ten months before his death in 1895, he not only did not change his opinion, but claimed that, if possible, his convictions had grown even stronger.

Interestingly, Broadus' eldest daughter, Eliza, was the spirit behind the founding of the Training School for Women connected with the Baptist seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. See Alma Hunt, *History of Woman's Missionary Union* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1964), p. 71.

" 'We are very sure that women were never intended for preachers. The entrance of women into the ministry and other public work, even if the scripture should not forbid it, would soon cut off the supply of raw material for making husbands and fathers. Somebody has to be the mother of the children and stay in the home to rear and train them. It would destroy our home life if women should, in any general sense, become public men.'

[\[footnote\]](#) "

BS, June 9, 1892, p. 1.

Women preachers were linked with other examples of feminine "excess" that were anathema to southern men—abolitionists, suffragettes, and "peripatetic female lecturers."[\[footnote\]](#) One man claimed that Baptist women really did not even want to speak publicly; those who did so had been "drawn out in the practice" by "unthoughtful brethren."[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, February 22, 1894, p. 7.

BS, November 15, 1894, p. 8.

Critics commonly used derision and humor to discredit the idea of women preaching. The Baptist Standard editor, J. B. Cranfill, was unfailingly supportive of women's having a mission society, but he found female preachers easy targets for his humor. He quoted Samuel Johnson as claiming that "a woman's preaching is like a dog walking on his hind legs. It is not done well but you are surprised to find it done at all."[\[footnote\]](#) He wondered if the proper appellation for such a woman was "pastoress" or "pasteurine."[\[footnote\]](#) When Mr. Brown of Kansas City urged those attending the 1892 Southern Baptist Convention to discontinue separate

organizations for the sexes and enforce equality in evangelistic causes, including women going into the pulpit on Sunday morning, reading the Bible, and explaining it, Dr. Cranfill responded by describing the situation in a way that "convulsed the convention with laughter."[\[footnote\]](#) Another man responded to that proposal by declaring that "the appearance of women in the pulpit" was an extreme to which Southern women would not go, "they [being] intelligent and knowing propriety."[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, April 25, 1895, p. 7.

BS, February 15, 1900, p. 4.

BS, May 19, 1892, p. 7.

Ibid.

The only serious plea made in support of women preachers by a Texas Baptist was published in the Baptist Standard in 1892 by the Reverend J. B. Cole of Plano. He argued that scriptural passages were being used to keep women from speaking to mixed, public assemblies in the same way they were partially applied a century before to impede the beginnings of Baptist mission work. He asked for a less prejudiced, selective interpretation of the Bible and pled with his fellow Baptists not to silence women's desire to speak their "blessed hope" to those around them. "We must surrender this old superstitious and barbarous club with which we have been beating back the army of earnest, Christian women, whose burning souls, long pent up, will lay into the breach by our sides and take the world for Christ, " he urged his fellow Baptists. To the women he confessed:

"My sister, you are just as free to tell the world of Jesus and his love as any man. No man has a right to try to bind your soul's longing to spread the news of salvation. . . plainly you should do all you can do as a Christian, to help the world to Christ."

And he suggested that the men look beneath the surface:

"Our sisters all over the Southern Baptist Convention territory are feeling the throbbing of soul, and only the resistance of the grand men whom they and all of us delight to honor, has hushed up their witness for Jesus. Do you say that is not true? Let all the convention submit the case to the women who compose the "auxiliary" and proof abundant will be given.[\[footnote\]](#)"

BS, June 9, 1892, p. 3.

In short, he felt that the imperative to preach the gospel was of far greater importance to Christians than the need to keep women in proper subjection.

Mr. Cole's article was "cheerfully printed," but judged extreme by the *Baptist Standard* editor. Letter-writers either satirized it or attacked it in future issues.[\[footnote\]](#) No woman offered a comment.

See *BS*, June 28, 1892, p. 3.

Baptist women were well aware that the anxiety generated over their increased activity within the church stemmed from men's fear that their bastion of authority and power—the ministry—would be challenged or invaded. Since male cooperation was contingent upon women's refraining from preaching or requesting ordination, the women were careful throughout the organizing phase of their missionary society work to assure the men that they "knew their place." At every point of progress they let the men know that all they wanted to do was raise money and approach other women—that there was no "dynamite" in their movement. Occasionally, however, they let a note of condescension creep into the repeated reassurances that they were operating within approved boundaries:

"Another notable feature in our work is that none of our women workers have applied for ordination to the ministry. Not even have any of them ascended the lecture platform. They are keeping silent in the churches in the most orthodox fashion. But their work speaks in trumpet tones and discounts the work of our brethren, not only in the amount of money raised according to our facilities, but in the expense of its collection and distribution.[\[footnote\]](#)"

BS, June 1, 1893, p. 3.

Interestingly, it was clear that it was "the brethren" who stood to be offended rather than God.[\[footnote\]](#) Women felt timid and blundering in their initial public efforts, but they emphasized the God-ordained nature of their limitations less frequently than did men:

BS, October 26, 1893, p. 2.

". . .our Bible women are constantly reminded by some of our very careful brethren, that 'woman's sphere is quite limited.' Oh, brethren of the church,

do not be alarmed. We women are not going to preach (and that is what you are afraid of).[\[footnote\]](#)"
BS, October 3, 1895, p. 7.

Rather than feeling restrained by God's commands, women believed that God's strength would help them overcome their timidity and lack of skill. They did not anticipate that he would call them to seek pastorates or ordination, but they viewed God as the authority and source of their emancipation for wider Christian service. Their obstacles were critical men and their own weakness and lack of faith.

Around the turn of the century, it became clear that women had kept their bargain—they had built a missionary society and developed avenues of service that did not encroach upon the males' ministerial authority. The Texas Baptist Women Mission Worker minutes of 1901 noted that "we are happily past the narrows where there was dread expressed lest the women break away from New Testament teachings and 'Usurp Authority.'"

[\[footnote\]](#) Texas Baptist life moved out of the quarrelsome, restrictive phase of the 1890s and into a period of growth and vigor. In a more relaxed and confident atmosphere, women were able to address all-church gatherings without the censure Mina Everett reaped in her 1895 speech in the Nacogdoches church yard.[\[footnote\]](#)

Proceedings of the Baptist Women's Mission Workers of Texas, 1901, p. 172.

See Chapter III, pp. 42-43.

The occasions of women speaking were generally an outgrowth of their missionary work: a foreign missionary giving a field report, a missionary-society leader making an appeal for a collection, or a woman repeating for the whole church a successful paper she had given at a meeting of the missionary society. The reputation of women orators like Mary Hill Davis drew males to the annual meetings of Woman's Missionary Union in order to hear her presidential addresses. Young people's unions and temperance gatherings provided other forums where women could make talks of a spiritual nature to men as well as women.

Gradually there emerged a special niche for female speakers that seemed safely distinct from the pastors' role. The first definition of these public

presentations was made concerning the work of women missionaries—they were to focus their evangelizing efforts on other women and children. Concern that women speakers maintain that boundary was less when they were in foreign or remote territories than it became when city missionaries, or "Bible women," were appointed to serve on the home front. Then it was made quite explicit that while these women taught the Bible, sometimes to large groups at once, their audiences would be limited to women and children and gathered in homes, industrial schools, or mission stations (not church auditoriums). Again and again women guaranteed that Bible women did "gospel work of every description—except preaching. These women do not preach. They do not want to preach. The brethren need not be alarmed. They are only trying to fill every womanly calling. . . . Their work is among the women and children altogether."[\[footnote\]](#)
BS, August 22, 1895, p. 7; see also *BS*, November 1, 1894, p. 2 and *BS*, October 3, 1895, p. 7.

Another distinction was that one made between "teaching" and "preaching." Content was not the distinguishing variable between these two; rather, it was the person and, sometimes, the place that made the difference. Preaching was done by men who had been "called" and ordained, usually within the setting of a designated worship service and often from a pulpit. When women quoted from and explained the Bible, talked about Jesus, and appealed to their listeners to respond by accepting salvation and exemplifying Christ, they were "teaching" or "giving a Bible talk" or "delivering an address," but never preaching.[\[footnote\]](#) The difference bespoke some artificiality, as was voiced by one who asked why it was permissible for women to teach classes that included men and speak at meetings of associations and conventions, yet not preach or conduct the church prayer meetings.[\[footnote\]](#) Part of the answer lay in labeling the activity "teaching"; another part lay in separating "formal" and "informal" assemblies of the church.

Examples of women speaking from the pulpit in the main sanctuary of a large church are rare; a Woman's Missionary Union anniversary service, such as the Jubilate of 1913 held at the First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, provided such an occasion.
BS, August 3, 1916, p. 25.

The setting apart of some church gatherings as "formal" and limiting the participation of women in them was a legalistic device employed to maintain an elite province for males, fulfilling their desires both to maintain power for its own sake and to conform to the biblical pattern of male leadership. The practice did not have New Testament precedents nor did it harmonize with Baptist doctrine of the nature of the church, but it satisfied a legalistic imperative of sexual hierarchy within the church. Regularly scheduled worship services were usually thought of as formal; the Sunday-morning service, the most formal. Designation was the crucial factor, however; the group assembled on Sunday morning for worship might call for a "dismissal prayer," following which the same group in the same place would become an informal assembly and a woman could make an address. Or she might speak prior to the call to worship. On the occasion of Miss Everett's missionary appeal, mentioned above, she was speaking to a Sunday-morning worship crowd assembled in the church yard rather than the building. Based on the formal/informal scheme, women were gradually allowed to speak freely at church business meetings, at young people's groups, and at worship services held in conjunction with encampments or training unions, to teach adult Sunday-school classes, give papers at association gatherings, and offer prayers at prayer meetings. There were even occasions when women addressed the Sunday-morning worship hour; e.g., in 1916 the Plainview church honored "Mother R. T. Jones" on her seventieth anniversary as a Baptist, and she responded with a "paper" that quoted scripture, gave her testimony, and pled with the unsaved.[\[footnote\]](#) Reports and appeals from women missionaries were occasionally heard at that hour, as well.

BS, July 20, 1916, p. 22.

More than a semantic distinction was being made in referring to women's speaking efforts as "teaching" instead of "preaching" and in scheduling them during less formal gatherings of the church. That difference lay in the authority and weightiness of the words women said. The fact that they were not ordained nor theologically trained and that they had not interpreted their religious impulses as a call from God to preach reduced the worth and importance of what they had to say. It also affected the subject matter they addressed: they spoke mainly on inspirational topics or simple biblical exegesis rather than deal with subjects of theological depth or of a

controversial nature, and they rarely issued a call for conversions. They (and their listeners) differentiated between speaking and speaking authoritatively. The male pastor bore that authority both by tradition and by the growing professionalization of the Baptist clergy through education and denominational structuring. Without a call from God and the church's recognition of that call in the rite of ordination, women's speaking would remain circumscribed in content and form.

At the same time, some women learned to be skilled in speaking publicly, even if less weight was attached to that performance. Consensus grew among Texas Baptists that "many of our 'elect sisters' are capable of rendering valuable service, edifying the body of Christ, by exercising their gifts in public."[\[footnote\]](#) While they were not thought of as preachers, female speakers were accorded approval and admiration. In his memoirs, J. B. Cranfill recalled several of them, including Willie Turner Dawson of Waco, "one of the greatest orators I ever heard. . .[her] witchery of words would melt a heart of stone"[\[footnote\]](#) and Mary Hill Davis, the Texas Woman's Missionary Union president whose addresses were "gems of literary artistry."[\[footnote\]](#) Because he was active in the temperance cause, Cranfill had heard Frances Willard on several occasions and claimed, *BS*, August 3, 1916, p. 21.

J. B. Cranfill, *From Memory* (Nashville: Broadman Press 1937), p. 171. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

"There was a richness of appeal in her voice that I have never sensed in any other orator. I cannot describe it. In addition thereto, her logic was irresistible and indescribable. . .she spared nothing; she side-stepped nothing; she swept on in a blaze of oratorical splendor that in my hearing has never been surpassed."[\[footnote\]](#)" *Ibid.*, p. 169.

Women speaking out and doing it well generated some fear in men that there would be no place in the church left for them, or that men would surrender all their responsibilities:

"Many men, nowadays, are doing their business for the Lord "in their wife's name." What a number of men we have today who turn over all their business pertaining to the Lord and His work to their wives—Sunday

school, prayer meeting, religious reading for the family, training of the children for God and His work.[\[footnote\]](#)"

BS, June 14, 1917, p. 5.

Male critics of female preaching ceased basing their argumentation on woman's sphere on the impossibility of a woman's filling the ministerial position, resting it instead on the assumption that God had arbitrarily excluded her from that role: "God has not given any reason for calling only men to preach."[\[footnote\]](#) Also claiming not to understand the mysteries of God's will, J. E. Byrd, writing in the *Baptist Standard* in 1917, recognized that women were not without the "native talent, mental and executive ability, eloquence or pleasing address" requisite to the preaching ministry—what they lacked was "a Divine call to the work."[\[footnote\]](#) Unwilling or unskilled at dealing with power in a straightforward way, Baptist males evaded or disclaimed their own need to assert authority; they merely exercised a divine right thrust upon them by God. But in grounding the issue of ministerial authority on God's failure to call women to the ministry, they left themselves in a precarious position, particularly in an institution that holds sacrosanct the autonomy of the individual Christian before God.

BS, August 22, 1912, p. 18.

BS, October 18, 1917, p. 30.

Administration within a local Baptist church is divided between the pastor and the diaconate, the latter a lay group of unspecified number. The selection of deacons occurs as part of the formation of a church or as soon as the membership includes qualified men to fill the position.[\[footnote\]](#) Since the New Testament also mentions a woman named Phoebe who served as a "deaconess" (Romans 16:1), Baptist churches have, in some periods of their history, appointed women to serve in that capacity. English Baptists listed the office in their earliest seventeenth-century confessions of faith and left numerous records of the performance of deaconesses in specific congregations. Although they were formally ordained and sometimes financially maintained by the church, deaconesses were not equivalent to deacons, but were assigned the special task of visiting and caring for the sick.[\[footnote\]](#)

Baptist churches generally refer to I Timothy 2:1-5 for those qualifications.

Charles W. Deweese, "Deaconesses in Baptist History: A Preliminary Study," *Baptist History and Heritage*, XII (January 1977), 53.

Deaconesses made their appearance among Baptists in America, as in England, in a period of intense preoccupation with liberty—in America's case, the latter half of the eighteenth century. These women, like their English counterparts, concerned themselves with the sick and poor, tending to "those things wherefor men are less fit."[\[footnote\]](#) As mentioned previously, deaconesses were common among the Separate Baptists who spread widely through the back-country of the South during that period. Their numbers declined, however, after 1800, due to the tightening of orthodoxy that accompanied the mergers of Baptist groups and the official establishment of a denominational hierarchy (exclusively male) and to the suppression of women that was invoked by southern males' reaction to the abolition and suffrage movements. Charles Deweese suggests that another reason for the decline of deaconesses was the growing tendency to limit the diaconate to business and management functions, excluding the caring and supporting ministries.[\[footnote\]](#)

Ibid., p. 54.

Ibid., pp. 54-55.

Women continued to fill the same benevolent roles without ordained status, and they assisted deacons by serving on committees to approach other "sisters" who were subjects of church discipline[\[footnote\]](#) and by helping with the preparation for the baptism of women, as modesty dictated. Women voted on candidates for church membership and on basic church documents, but throughout the nineteenth century, the "business" of the church was restricted more and more to meetings male members were specifically required to attend. Although a woman was responsible, in many cases, for writing or asking a pastor to come and form a church, once the church was established, her official leadership was inevitably surrendered to males.

Sweet, p. 49.

Since women had lost designated roles in church government and had been virtually silenced in worship, they pushed for a re-evaluation of their place in the local church in the period of cultural shifting that followed the Civil

War. They did so in part by reviving the concept of deaconess. That office was a continual topic of controversy from the time the Texas Baptist church revived from Reconstruction until shortly after the turn of the century. Prior to the consolidation of state Baptist forces, the convention of the south-central portion of the state debated the topic "Do the Scriptures Authorize the Appointment of Women as Deaconesses?" at its 1884 annual meeting. [\[footnote\]](#) No record of the content of that debate exists, but interest in the issue might have been generated by the organization in 1880 of a women's mission society in conjunction with the State Convention. A few churches named women to the office of deaconess, including the First Baptist Church of Waco, [\[footnote\]](#) but it is likely these were women in charge of the "circles" that the pastor, B. H. Carroll, directed. [\[footnote\]](#) Given Carroll's outspoken chauvinism, they could not have exercised congregation-wide leadership, [\[footnote\]](#) although they were undoubtedly influential among the women.

McBeth, p. 142, quoting *Minutes of the Baptist State Convention of Texas, 1884*, p. 53.

Frank Burkhalter, *A World-Visioned Church* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1946), p.

Mrs. W. J. J. Smith, *A Centennial History of the Baptist Women of Texas: 1830-1930* (Dallas: Woman's Missionary Union of Texas, 1933), pp. 49-50.

McBeth, p. 143, concurs with this opinion.

Typical discussions of the office of deaconess in Texas Baptist newspapers in the 1880s and 1890s de-emphasized the official nature of the position. A common interpretation was that the term referred simply to the wife of a deacon, as exemplified in this report: "We have another deacon and deaconess now, Brother O. B. Love and wife." [\[footnote\]](#) Another typical viewpoint indicated that since women were already functioning as deaconesses, or female helpers, in churches, why bother to ordain them? An editorial favoring this informal arrangement explained: "Practically, the churches have the office [of deaconess]. There are always good women in the church ready to serve it. They need not be ordained." [\[footnote\]](#) By 1900 the same stance was bolstered with scholarship; in a lengthy discussion, F. M. McConnell explained that the Greek word "deaconess" could also be translated simply "servant." Since he felt that the idea of a woman serving in an official ordained capacity "[made] havoc of our knowledge of the

Word of God," he concluded that the Romans passage was probably conveying that Phoebe had been entrusted with some errand for her church. [\[footnote\]](#) A gentleman from South Carolina, C. C. Brown, wrote the *Baptist Standard* in 1902 in support of the position that the New Testament actually referred to women who served as deacons, the same office men held, [\[footnote\]](#) but his idea was judged extreme by McConnell and not commented upon by women.

Texas Baptist and Herald (Dallas), January 12, 1887, n.p. Hereinafter in these notes this publication will be referred to as "TBH."

BS, February 16, 1893, p. 4.

BS, February 22, 1900, p. 7.

BS, April 24, 1902, p. 3.

Controversy around the deaconess issue had been raised because women sought to enlarge their activities in church, not because they wanted to infiltrate the diaconate; therefore, the issue died early in the twentieth century after women defined mission and education roles that fulfilled their needs. They did not have the perimeters of those new roles absolutely circumscribed and they continuously sought to enlarge them, but as long as they did not infringe upon the male prerogatives of management (control of money and policy) and superiority (symbolized by ordination), they were given freer and freer rein with their missionary organization and educational work.

Late in the nineteenth century, similar arguments over women's rights in church meetings were settled by this assignment of concerns—service for women and management for men. In small churches a woman's right to make or second a motion or to serve as a clerk often caused grave concern and generated letters to the newspapers in search of legitimation for such acts. Yet they were cautioned that to so speak would be to make themselves "conspicuous before the church," behaving, therefore, "contrary to the teaching of God's word." [\[footnote\]](#) If, because there were no males or so few, the organization or continuance of a church necessitated a woman's doing more than raising her hand to vote, the church was advised to disband or never to form. [\[footnote\]](#) In such cases, women struggled with the limitations of their passive, assisting role. They did not desire to supersede men in church government—they merely wanted to participate and they

wanted the church to survive. Once there were sufficient numbers of active men to carry on church meetings and there was other satisfying work for women to do, the women were willing to limit themselves to formalities on such occasions. Men, on the other hand, recognizing that women were content to expand their horizons without demanding equality, relaxed the limitations on women's participation. Women not only voted in meetings, they spoke to issues and occasionally served on committees.

BS, June 24, 1897, p. 7.

BS, May 27, 1897, p. 1.

The place women had carved for themselves in the administration of Southern Baptist churches in Texas by 1920 was larger than the one they had filled in 1880, but, like their expansion in worship, it was a less significant niche than the one occupied by men. Men retained exclusive rights to the diaconate and continued to control church policy and expenditures. Women, however, by structuring and expanding the traditional nurturing roles they had previously performed informally and by adding extensive missionary and educational responsibilities, became so vital to the church's life that they acquired the power to influence that policy. They also became skilled in performing the same managerial tasks that deacons carried out; however, because they conceived of themselves as assistants and supporters—second-class citizens of the kingdom—they did not hear a "call" to use those talents in the local church beyond the limited range of their own and their children's activities.

While acquiring new avenues of participating in the life and work of the church, women did not neglect their traditional, uncontroversial paths of religious service: benevolence and the instruction of children. On the contrary, they systematically organized and eventually dominated both areas. Early deaconesses had performed these services in the eighteenth century and ladies' aid societies carried on their work in the nineteenth, but both those groups suffered from the limited size and poor organization typical of most Baptist churches. They accomplished the tasks on an intermittent basis and they shared the responsibilities—particularly the religious instruction of the young—with men. But with the separation of the economic and domestic functions of the family and the development of churches large enough to sustain the same division of labor, these ministries

eventually became the province of women, as the managerial became the men's. Exceptions were made in the case of institutional, large-scale benevolence (orphanages and hospitals) and the direction of Sunday school boards—men provided leadership in both areas—but the carrying-out of the work on a personal and congregational basis was left to women.

The majority of Christian women felt more comfortable with benevolent tasks than with presiding over a meeting or leading a public prayer, since many forms of charity were extensions of domestic expertise. Women were encouraged to consecrate their everyday activities to God, thereby adding to their significance. "Just a visit with the darning bag, dear mother, to the lonely heart next door--just a cheery greeting over the telephone when it rains. . . .Just a bowl of soup or apple pie passed over the back fence, means so much when done for the Master," explained one who found satisfaction in her traditional role.[\[footnote\]](#) Women escaped tedium and solitude by imagining their efforts joined not only with the deity, but with their Christian sisters, each stitch they took in an orphan's garment forming "a link in the chain of good work that our noble women are doing."[\[footnote\]](#) The familiarity and acceptability of women's ministering and being ministered to with personal attention and assistance led them to refer to it as a "sweet work":

BS, February 3, 1916, p. 22.

BS, May 11, 1899, p. 10.

". . .we can find something to do; and above all, let us do that something cheerfully. Let us take some task off some tired mother's hands, or help nurse the sick baby back to health." "How the woman helps the church, when she goes in the name of God and the church to the home of distress and illness; she becomes one of them, and her cheery words are like music to their sickened senses. It is the woman's work to visit the poor and the sick and see to their wants, and when circumstances render it impossible for the poorer members to attend church, to go to them in their homes and read to them and make them feel that they are remembered."[\[footnote\]](#)"

Ibid.

In the twentieth century Southern Baptists began to underwrite benevolent institutions, and women in local congregations assisted these corporate

efforts with contributions of time and money. The Texas women's missionary societies attempted to encourage and draw attention to diverse, individual ministrations by including "Personal Service" among their official departments, but this area of work remained elusive and less affected by statisticians and campaigns than either education or missions proved to be. This was probably not because the incidence of personal benevolence diminished between 1880 and 1920—many Baptist churches remained small, rural, and individualistic and Baptist women were still primarily homemakers at the end of the period—but because so much of its reward lay in its personal, spontaneous aspect. Whether directed toward large institutions, enumerated and credited toward a "standard of excellence," or, as was more typical, quietly bestowed upon family and neighbor, performing small acts of kindness was satisfying to Baptist women from both Christian and feminine perspectives.

"None but a mother's heart can direct the teaching of the little children" [\[footnote\]](#) became the conviction of most Americans in the nineteenth century, and Texas Baptists were not exceptions. Females (even those who were not mothers possessed a potential "mother-heart") led in the religious instruction of Baptist children--Sunday schools, mission study groups, and training unions. Baptist historian Leon McBeth confirms the paradox that "among Southern Baptists, a denomination that often forbade its women to teach in the church, Sunday School teaching was from the first, primarily a ministry of women." [\[footnote\]](#) This exception was made because Sunday schools were not officially integrated into Baptist church life until late in the nineteenth century; they were at first extra-church, community or private efforts, and a rigorous application of the scriptures silencing women was not made in these arenas. Moreover, Sunday schools imparted information, but did not offer "invitations" to convert. The exception was also attributable to the natural affinity of women and children widely respected at the time. When Baptist churches did incorporate Sunday school work into the denomination's programs, women had already won an undisputed place as teachers in all but adult classes that included men.

BS, June 19, 1913, p. 11.

McBeth, p. 105.

A review of "teaching and training" among Texas Baptists prior to 1920 lists few women's names;[[footnote](#)] women were the "foot soldiers" of the movement for religious education in local churches, while men held the officer posts. But we know that women taught in Thomas Pilgrim's first Baptist Sunday school in 1829[[footnote](#)] and that a woman named Piety Hadley "assisted, rather led the way in organizing the first Sunday-school in the [Houston] church" in the 1840s.[[footnote](#)] By the 1890s women not only taught in Sunday schools, they sometimes directed them. A man was still considered a more appropriate director, but "if you have not a man with the piety and backbone to become your superintendent, secure a lady, an intelligent Christian woman. She will make things lively," advised a *Baptist Standard* editorial of 1893.[[footnote](#)] Women also participated in Sunday school conventions and training normals more freely than they did in other denominational gatherings of both sexes, these clearly falling in the "informal" category of church meetings. Such participation indicated more than the fact that they had "slipped through the ranks" however—it was a clear recognition of their competence in the field of education.

L. R. Elliott, ed., *Centennial Story of Texas Baptists* (Chicago: Hammond Press, 1936), p. 307-320.

J. M. Carroll, *A History of Texas Baptists* (Dallas: Baptist Standard Publishing Co., 1923), p. 41.

J. B. Link, *Texas Historical and Biographical Magazine* (Austin, Texas, 1891-92), II, 247.

BS, February 16, 1893, p. 2.

Through their state-wide organization, Baptist Women Mission Workers, women perfected graded programs for mission study for girls and boys and held training institutes that put the male-run Sunday school program to shame. "The redemption of our Sunday schools from confusion and inefficiency waits upon women who have received adequate special training," declared Waco pastor J. M. Dawson in 1913,[[footnote](#)] but men remained in firm control of directoral roles and board positions. Within local churches men were also generally the titular heads of the Sunday school program, with women assisting as directors of all but adult departments.

BS, June 19, 1913, p. 11.

The religious education of Texas Baptist children included Bible study, of course, and, in the special "bands" organized by missionary societies, information about-Baptist missions. A great emphasis was placed on stewardship and the need of children to give systematically even if that consisted of daily setting aside one egg in a "missionary basket" to be sold for a missionary contribution.[\[footnote\]](#) Moral instruction—from ethics to etiquette—was another fit topic for children's edification. Around the turn of the century "training unions" became popular, first for young adults, then filtering down to younger ages. These classes included practice in speaking and evangelistic techniques, which eventually developed into popular oratorical and Bible-knowledge contests. Training unions were co-educational and provided young women with more "informal" opportunities to participate equally with men in near-worship settings. They maintained the acceptable legalistic formula designating subjection—usually young men served as presidents—but young women were allowed to hold other offices, give devotional talks to mixed audiences, even to win "sword drills" if their command of the Scriptures was superior.

TBH, May 22, 1884, p. 4.

With exposure to classes and experience in teaching, women's Bible knowledge was both emphasized and improved during the period of this study. They did not normally address themselves to subjects of a deep theological or doctrinal nature (only a select group of ministers did), but they strove to acquire a face-value grasp of the Bible, particularly the New Testament. Josephine Jenkins Truett, wife of Texas's most celebrated Baptist minister,[\[footnote\]](#) wrote the weekly Sunday school column carried in the *Baptist Standard* in the early 1900s, but she did so anonymously.[\[footnote\]](#) Her lessons were simple verse-by-verse explanations of a Bible passage—the adult-Bible-study format common to Sunday school literature—but they were well-written and judged suitably instructive even for male readers. Mrs. Truett and other women demonstrated that they had the biblical knowledge to participate in the denomination on equal footing with men, just as they had the managerial skills, but they chose to limit themselves in order to maintain the ideal of sexual hierarchy whose rationale they were inadvertently destroying.

Mrs. Truett was also the daughter of a well-known Baptist layman and Baylor trustee, Judge W. H. Jenkins, and sister of the missionary to China,

Annie Jenkins Sallee. She was active in Woman's Missionary Union and was particularly supportive of its educational goals.

Her authorship was acknowledged following her retirement in 1902. See *BS*, April 3, 1902, p. 4.

Those men who felt certain that women would continue to maintain some degree of subjection or who were unthreatened by their achieving equality celebrated these educational accomplishments as the solution to the social upheaval in women's role. With the loss of the demand for women's physical labor in industrial society, women might have been reduced to mere sexual objects, "human parasites," explained J. M. Dawson, but Christian enterprises expanded to include them. Women were able to replace the physical with mental activity and to employ what they learned to accomplish "the mightiest task that ever loomed on the horizon of time. . .the evangelism of the world." [\[footnote\]](#) E. C. Routh, addressing women graduates of the seminary training school in 1915, echoed the same sentiment: he viewed education and the resulting skills as the proper replacement for women's lost domestic functions if they were accompanied by strong religious devotion; otherwise "weakened domestic and self-sacrificing traditions of women" were "a dangerous thing." [\[footnote\]](#) Dawson, a remarkably fair man, clearly felt that return to those confining "self-sacrificing traditions" was not an option. In addition to encouraging women to develop their educational potential, he acknowledged that by doing so, they could correct the church's misogynist imbalance and bring into existence "a full, well-rounded expression of Christianity." [\[footnote\]](#) *BS*, June 19, 1913, pp. 1, 3, 11.
BS, July 8, 1915, pp. 1, 5, 25.
BS, June 19, 1913, p. 11.

During the nineteenth century the role of the clergy in Southern Baptist churches evolved to one of greater power, authority, and status, from the simple frontier farmer-minister to the ministerial professional. At a time when the status of the clergy was declining among the older, more established Protestant denominations, Baptist preachers were just forming seminaries, winning financial support, and working full-time for a single congregation. Southern Baptists as a group were moving from a scattered, sectarian form of government to an organized church-type structure; the

denomination, as well as its professionals, was still on an incline. Historian Kenneth K. Bailey affirmed that clergymen retained exalted status in the South through the 1920s and until the present in some regions.[\[footnote\]](#) Until well into the twentieth century, when other professional classes developed, ministers stood out as men of prominence, education, and intelligence in many rural Texas communities. Baptist ministers, although they hold no official rank within the movement, ironically had access to nearly unlimited power. A Baptist pastor with dramatic talent and personality could gain higher prestige within his group than is accorded official priests in other denominations.[\[footnote\]](#)

Kenneth K. Bailey, *Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964), p. 163.

Paul M. Harrison, *Authority and Power in the Free Church Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 217.

With the acquisition of education and support, Baptist ministers tended more and more to preside over their congregations, even to control the diaconate. The church's women did not escape the pastor's charm and power, but looked to him for assignments, validation, and direction as they formerly had assisted the deacons. Whether or not women participated actively within a church depended largely upon the attitude of the pastor. He was the focus of the denomination's dictum to "help those women," particularly in forming missions organizations, the one who stood accused of "crippling more than half the numerical strength of his church" when he discouraged women's working in it, whether by his "open opposition or silent indifference."[\[footnote\]](#) A female who charged pastors of neglecting the women indicated that "it [was]. . . his business to see that his women worked efficiently. . ."[\[footnote\]](#) The relationship had its symbiotic elements, however, and women had an impact on the pastor's job security. A state convention board report of 1898 stated that women were insisting that their churches become enthusiastic about missions or that uncooperative ministers move on; "and they surely ought to move or be moved," the board concurred.[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, March 8, 1900, p. 4.

BS, January 22, 1914, p. 30.

Carroll, p. 782-783.

The alliance of Southern Baptist women and pastors was not the combining of two disestablished groups as described by Ann Douglas in *The Feminization of American Culture*,[\[footnote\]](#) but that of the protector/teacher (clergy) directing and supporting his dependents/assistants (women). In Douglas's analysis, the biblical pattern of church women's link to power existing through their husbands was altered; women were largely influenced by and sought to influence one dominant male—the pastor. Fannie B. Davis, in bemoaning the passivity of too many women toward their religious duty, claimed that they had "formed habits of depending upon our pastors for information about all gospel work" instead of reading and thinking for themselves.[\[footnote\]](#) Although Baptist women were attached to their pastors, they did not go so far as to assign him a superhuman power of mediation on their behalf with God; they felt a personal, unfettered relationship with the Godhead themselves. They and ministers were co-workers—often a woman was referred to as being "a friend to her pastor" and sympathetic ministers were called "friends of the women's cause." [\[footnote\]](#) The linking of pastors and women as distinct groups was most frequently encountered in reference to the prohibition cause: "the temperance movement began with preachers and Christian women and they have made all that we have of progress in temperance possible,"[\[footnote\]](#) although they were also mentioned together in missions and local projects of every sort: "The Baptists at Mt. Pleasant, led by the sisters and pastor Jenkins, have just finished and dedicated a good house."[\[footnote\]](#)

Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).

BS, February 22, 1894, p. 7.

BS, August 28, 1902, p. 6; BS, January 7, 1915, p. 4.

BS, November 5, 1914, p. 4.

BS, June 14, 1892, p. 2.

Some ministers took pride in exercising repressive control over "their" women, as did one from El Paso who reported, "My women don't speak [in worship]; they have too much sense and womanliness, and I am glad of it."[\[footnote\]](#) Others played on the emotions of impressionable young women. With "Sweet Singer Brown" singing "Beckoning Hands" in the background (guaranteed to make the "tears flow freely"), evangelist Sid Williams

requested all young women who would agree to dance no more to come forward and give him their hand. "If they all keep their promises it will be a long time before the society columns of *"The News"* will record a successful ball in Stephenville," reported the Dallas newspaper.^[footnote] Of course, liaisons between a preacher and a deacon's wife and/or an organist would not have become a cliché were it not for an occasional minister who extended pastoral care to its limits, marking his sure downfall. Other men felt there was grave danger short of sexual congress in the minister's developing effeminate characteristics by being around women too much.^[footnote] Admiration lay with pastors who remained "men among men." A "gushy, mouthing preacher" who subscribed to the notion that "kissing the sisters was a part of his ministerial duty" was characterized as having, perhaps, a "soft heart"—for certain, a "soft head."^[footnote] "Preacher brethren" were warned to avoid all appearance of such evil,^[footnote] but told that it would be difficult because "there are "always enough noble-hearted women whose overflowing, sympathetic souls, in the magnetism of their feminine sweetness, will just simply pet [you] to death."^[footnote]

BS, June 22, 1893, p. 5.

Reprinted in *BS*, May 26, 1892, p. 2.

BS, December 20, 1900, p. 2.

BS, April 23, 1914, p. 17.

BS, May 1, 1902, p. 4.

BS, December 20, 1900, p. 2.

One typical response of women to their minister was to take care of him. They expressed to him—a model, dominant male, if not a deified one—the contradictory blend of nurture and respect that females accord males in a patriarchal system. As an extension of their domestic expertise, the women of a church often took the lead in purchasing, furnishing, and maintaining the pastor's house. They considered it an honor to entertain him in their own homes and laid out their finest foods and furnishings when the preacher came to dinner. An occasion like Christmas legitimated their showering him with tokens of affection—gifts marked by luxury as well as practicality. Gifts the minister from Paris, Texas, received for Christmas, 1886, included a study chair and a portable writing table, a hanging lamp "from a sister," an elegant dressing gown from another, and a plush-covered match case.

Although the family as a whole was "pounded" with foodstuffs, the wife's individual gifts were a quilt from the Ladies' Aid Society and a picture drawn by one of the women.[\[footnote\]](#) Despite widely publicized exceptions to the rule, most ministers did not make sexual advances and were safe recipients of women's "tender ministrations."[\[footnote\]](#) They—like Christ—remained idealized males, objects of repressed, rather than overt, sexuality.

TBH, January 12, 1887, n.p.

The women were "safe" from sexual advances; whether the men's egos remained untouched is doubtful.

Ministers served as a focus for women's ambition, as well as their sexuality. They could do for a woman what she could not do for herself (yet had been taught was the highest good)—preach the gospel. Women who had been silenced could preach vicariously by supporting the preacher. In 1890 the entire salary of M. G. Trevino, the principal Baptist missionary to Mexico, was paid by Eliza McCoy of Dallas; she also supported a pastor in Pecos.[\[footnote\]](#) Her motivation was identical to that behind much of the sacrificial giving of women to the church. Through their money and the ministers it paid, women had the power to serve in a way they were denied or of which they were afraid.

Carroll, p. 674.

Marrying the minister was a way to gain even greater access to the kind of authority he wielded, but a woman who did so gave up her own sentimentalized fantasies while still having to compete with those of other women. Prior to the twentieth century, being the pastor's wife was the only religious vocation besides serving as a missionary to which Baptist women could aspire.

Like any idealized figure, the pastor was also the target of women's disillusionment and criticism. "Our preachers are not the only ones who encounter hard times upon nerves and brains," pointed out Lida B. Robertson in a 1902 *Baptist Standard* article. She reminded the victimized clergymen that nurses, mothers, and teachers were subject to similar discipline and exhaustion.[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, August 25, 1904, p. 2.

On the whole, however, women viewed their attachment to the pastor in a positive light. Both enjoyed the exchange of affection and attention, typical of that sentimental age, but the interchange of women's assistance and support for the pastor's power was the important basis of their alliance. It fell short of the feminist goal of direct power, but these women were the subordinate class in a patriarchal system, and access to the primary source of denominational authority was better than no power at all. As historian Willie Lee Rose wisely noted, "Social progress of the oppressed usually begins by indirection, and allies are found wherever they may be found."

[\[footnote\]](#)

Willie Lee Rose, "American Women in Their Place," *The New York Review of Books*, July 14, 1977, p. 4.

Mission Field

Mission field. Southern Baptists were late to catch and capitalize upon the missionary enthusiasm of nineteenth-century Protestantism. They entered most foreign fields after Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and a number of British and American cooperative bodies had already established enclaves. Having gotten a late start, however, they have been strong finishers, winning themselves the reputation of "the most persistently missionary-minded of American churches," [\[footnote\]](#) and have maintained their enthusiasm for the evangelistic enterprise to the present.

Irwin T. Hyatt, Jr., *Our Ordered Lives Confess* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 4.

Until after the Civil War, "home" or "domestic" missions were of primary concern to Southern Baptists, and Texas itself still qualified as a mission field. When Texas ladies' aid societies packed mission boxes, they usually sent them to those working on the western frontier of the state, in Indian territories, or on the Mexican border. They still shared with northern Baptists the heroes and heroines of the faith like Adoniram and Ann H. Judson who were sent to Burma by American Baptists in the early nineteenth century, prior to the creation of separate conventions over sectional conflicts; and some notice was given to the few Southern Baptist missionaries who went to China when its ports opened to foreigners in mid-century. A real interest in foreign missions was not born within the state, however, until 1880, when Texas' own "sons and daughters" began volunteering to serve as missionaries in foreign lands. [\[footnote\]](#) Elliott, p. 49.

The first distant place to capture the imaginations of Texas Baptists was Brazil. Attention was focused in that direction by a retired Confederate general, A. T. Hawthorne, who, in his disillusionment with the outcome of the Civil War, decided to lead a group of emigrants there in order, one supposes, to recover the glory of the Old South. [\[footnote\]](#) Originally Hawthorne had no religious motive for colonization, but his subsequent conversion gave him added incentive to abandon the compromised United States for a place with more promise. He was so effectively persuasive on the topic that he was hired by Texas Baptists to be an agent of their Foreign

Mission Board, promoting and collecting money for mission causes.

[\[footnote\]](#)

O. K. Armstrong and Marjorie M. Armstrong, *The Indomitable Baptists* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1967), pp. 261-262.

Hawthorne is something of a mystery man. It is not known how or why he came to Texas, but he remained there, working for the Foreign Mission Board until his death in 1899. Because of his wife's illness and his child's untimely death, he decided to promote the Brazilian cause rather than take it on himself. See A. R. Crabtree, *Baptists in Brazil: A History of Southern Baptists' Greatest Mission Field* (Rio de Janeiro: Baptist Publishing House of Brazil, 1953), pp. 35-37.

Anne Luther came to Texas as a teenager in 1877 when her father took a pastorate at Galveston and later became the president of Baylor Female College. She had previously felt the appeal of mission work and thought her call was to serve in Burma like the Judsons, but Hawthorne turned her ambitions toward Brazil. As Texas' first foreign volunteer, she, along with her friend and neighbor Fannie B. Davis, spurred Texas women to organize a statewide missionary society in 1880 in order to rally support for her venture of faith.[\[footnote\]](#)

See Module 3.2.

Just prior to leaving for Brazil, Anne Luther married William Buck Bagby, a young Texas pastor whose attention had also been directed to Brazil by Hawthorne. After a forty-eight-day sea voyage from Baltimore to Rio de Janeiro on which Anne was the only female passenger, the Bagbys set about to proclaim "from North to South and from the Atlantic to the Andes" their Baptist version of the Christian faith.[\[footnote\]](#) They remained in Brazil from 1881 until their deaths in 1939 (he) and 1942 (she), at which time there were 780 Southern Baptist churches in that nation comprising over 53,000 members.[\[footnote\]](#) Although other missionaries joined them (Z. C. and Kate Crawford Taylor, another Texas couple, arrived by 1882), the Baptist cause in Brazil is clearly attributable to the combined sum of 120 years they gave to the work, plus those of their five children, all of whom remained in South America as missionaries.[\[footnote\]](#)

Crabtree, p. 39.

Samuel B. Hesler, *A History of Independence Baptist Church 1839-1969 and Related Organizations* (Dallas: Executive Board of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, 1970), p. 104.

Crabtree, p. 3.

Anne Luther Bagby's early career in Brazil demonstrates the extent to which her religious vocation differed from that of the Baptist "sisters" she left behind in Texas. It is worth noting that although she began her missionary career as a married woman, she had received a call to the work before she met her future husband. Her serving was obviously shaped by her married status and by the fact that she bore nine children, but her sense of purpose and dedication existed independent of that marriage.

Religion was taken seriously by Anne Luther as a child:

"I was early concerned about my soul's salvation, and for a year before conversion went each day into a vacant room to read the Scriptures and pray for acceptance at the throne of grace. Faith came to my relief at last, and in my eleventh year I experienced a change of heart while at family prayers. We were then living in St. Louis, and after baptism in the Mississippi River I united with the Carondolet Baptist Church, of which my father was pastor.[\[footnote\]](#)"

Ibid., p. 38.

Her decision to surrender her life for a special mission was born of another period of intense religious preoccupation when she was just seventeen:

I have from my earliest remembrance been interested in world missions, but not until my seventeenth year while at the Lexington (Mo.) Baptist College was I seized with the conviction that I was a chosen instrument to bear the glad tidings abroad. It was only after a great struggle that I became willing to give myself up to the work.[\[footnote\]](#)

Ibid.

The fact that Anne L. Bagby interpreted her vocation as that of a missionary rather than simply that of a "missionary's wife" was demonstrated by her early mastery of the Portuguese language and her working steadily, mainly at educational pursuits like translating and preparing religious literature,

even when her children were young. Irwin Hyatt, a scholar of Chinese missions, pointed out that most women missionaries with children could undertake outside tasks (provided they remained healthy) because of the abundance and cheapness of domestic help.[\[footnote\]](#)
Hyatt, p. 69.

Like many other missionaries, the Bagbys exhibited a restless, pioneering spirit: their pattern was to establish a small church, then leave its maintenance and growth in the hands of a missionary replacement or a native preacher (sometimes a converted priest or Protestant of another denomination) and move to begin a new work. At times, they lived in the building where they held worship services, so it was impossible for Anne, even when she was homebound, not to be actively involved in the evangelistic enterprise.[\[footnote\]](#)
Crabtree, p. 44.

The Bagbys' emphasis on congregational self-support and native leadership created the healthiest of the Southern Baptist mission stations. By 1901 there were Baptists in most Brazilian states, eighty-three churches and 5,000 members. The missionary couple finally settled in Sao Paulo and, with the demands of motherhood lessening, Anne began a project that established her reputation as an educator: the founding of a school for girls, the Progressive Brazilian School. Roman Catholics who were not cooperative with any other aspect of the Baptist work would entrust the education of their children to the foreigners. For the next twenty years Anne Bagby devoted herself to teaching in and administering the school, whose future was finally guaranteed with the purchase of land and the construction of an impressive building with funds from the 1920 Seventy-five Million Campaign of the Southern Baptist Convention. The school was eventually granted college status and the administration was taken over by missionary males, then by natives.[\[footnote\]](#)

The name of the school was changed in 1934 to Colegio Batista Brasileiro Ana Bagby in honor of the founder.

In the early decades of her life as a missionary, therefore, Anne Bagby's church work was unlike that of most of her Texas counterparts in that she often gave full time to it and expended the energy necessary to begin and

run a school despite having a large family. She was also called upon to give frequent testimony of her faith to members of a different culture, a process that forced all missionaries repeatedly to examine themselves and their task, in the process either raising doubts or strengthening convictions. In Mrs. Bagby's case, belief in Christianity and its Southern Baptist interpretation remained firm. After her first, most trying decade in Brazil, a period that included the death of two children, she wrote:

I would rather my children die now than be even cold Christians. I want them to be afire with love to Jesus. God grant that we may, none of us, grow cold or indifferent to his service. If I must be kept warm by losing what I love best, I cannot ask otherwise.[\[footnote\]](#)
Hesler, p. 102.

The confrontation with a new culture was generally handled positively by Anne Bagby. She and her husband viewed Brazil as inspiringly beautiful and most of the people as friendly.[\[footnote\]](#) A common tie with Europe facilitated the mastery of language and provided a form of Christianity, Roman Catholicism, with which Brazilians were already familiar, although Baptists conceived of the latter as their greatest menace rather than a boon. Given General Hawthorne's original hope of perpetuating the antebellum South, it is no surprise that the cultural and denominational guidelines the Bagbys set generally followed those of Southern Baptists in the United States—district associations, a nationwide convention, local church governments, women's missionary organizations, seminaries and printing facilities were all based on American models. But the operation and occupation of these institutions by Brazilian natives created a difference, one that was sufficiently marked to make the United States rather alien to the Bagby children.
Crabtree, p. 39.

The prevalence of Catholicism in Brazil, particularly the veneration of Mary, was viewed as unfortunate by the Bagbys, but they did not perceive the natives as members of an unknowable culture as did many missionaries in the Far East and some in Latin American countries. Their acceptance of Brazilian standards extended to a wide mixture of class and race. A woman from Texas who came to Brazil in 1900 wrote to her parents that among

Brazilian Baptists, ". . .color makes no difference. A woman black as can be embraces me the same as a white one."[\[footnote\]](#)
BS, June 7, 1900, p. 10.

The "otherness" of foreigners was a constant source of interest and information passed between missionaries and their supporters at home. Details of social customs and of natural surroundings were frequently reported upon by missionary women, supplementing the meager educational and experiential opportunities of women in the States. In exchange for their prayers and contributions, the women at home vicariously participated in a wider life, and they welcomed descriptions of scenery, ritual, and daily habits different from their own. Judgment and denigration were reserved for "idolatrous" religion (everything but Protestantism) and illiteracy, particularly that which kept women repressed. "Heathen" was a frequently used term, but it connoted ignorance, especially ignorance of biblical religion, rather than little or no worth. A missionary to Mexico, Mrs. H. R. Mosely, explained her position:

Do you consider the people heathen? I am frequently asked. Facts illustrate this. People who have been to Mexico noticed the peculiar sad look of the women. . . .This must be due to the fact that they have no consolation. The women care for no change. They have no hope for a better life.

After describing the Mexicans' acute poverty, she praised their generosity, artistry, and devotion. "I am getting somewhat homesick to get back to my home among these people," she concluded.[\[footnote\]](#)
BS, May 30, 1895, p. 7.

Rather than being disdained by missionaries, the poor and ignorant were the most receptive audience among any foreign group. A Bible woman who worked with German immigrants in Baltimore despaired of Germans' stubborn self-righteousness. "I wish they were heathen," she said, "because [then] I could have a hold on them."[\[footnote\]](#)
Ibid.

Women specifically identified with the disinherited classes because they saw themselves as part of another group assigned inferior status. Because they believed that the gospel alone was responsible for "elevating them

above the level of the heathen,"^[footnote] they felt a special responsibility to serve as the agents of reform among the oppressed. "Why should not woman use all her influence to send that gospel which has done so much for her to the poor benighted heathen?" asked a woman from Texarkana.

^[footnote] She, other Texas women, and the missionaries they supported believed, however, that all reform necessary stemmed from a single source and action—a personal faith in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible. From this source flowed self-respect, desire for knowledge and betterment, or, at least, the consolation of a perfect afterlife, not a revolution of true equality within the sphere of either the family or the state. Their "revolutionary" goals were limited to their own limited attainments—improvement and hope—and reflected their ultimate acceptance of inequality as the order of sexual and civil arrangements.

BS, February 14, 1895, p. 7.

Ibid.

Other than Brazil, Texas Baptist missionaries volunteered in largest numbers to serve in China, a far more alien culture to Texans than any in Latin America.^[footnote] Not just the poor and uneducated Chinese and not just Chinese women were of heathen status—all elements of eastern life save its beauty and respect for tradition were difficult for missionaries to understand and accept. Danger lay in their remaining aloof and patronizing while giving their lives in service to a "works-righteousness" goal among those they neither understood nor respected.^[footnote]

The Southern Baptist Convention lists foreign missionaries by state of birth rather than the place they were living when they were sent. By those records, Texas women volunteered to serve in the following places before and including 1920: China, 25; Brazil, 15; Mexico, 7; Japan, 2; Africa, 1; Chile, 1. See Carroll, p. 603-605.

Irwin T. Hyatt, Jr., describes the life of one Southern Baptist missionary to China, T. P. Crawford, who manifested this attitude of allegiance to a legalistic system rather than to the people he lived among for forty-eight years. See Hyatt, pp. 3-62.

Most females who volunteered for the China mission field were influenced by the correspondence and example of Charlotte (Lottie) Moon, a Virginian of high breeding who gave singular service in northern China from 1873

until her death in 1912. Her well-publicized pleas for organized support for missions among Southern Baptist women led directly to the formation of convention-wide women's organization in 1888. She pioneered the practice of "itinerating," the Chinese equivalent of circuit-riding, or traveling from village to village for weeks and months at a time, a practice that won her the accolade, "the greatest man among our missionaries." [\[footnote\]](#) Proceedings of the SBC, 1890, p. xxxvii. Hyatt, pp. 93-136, contains an excellent character study of this complex woman.

The lure of China was felt by several Texas women late in the nineteenth century; among the first to answer a call to that field was Annie Jenkins, whose papers and correspondence are preserved in the Baylor University archives. Miss Jenkins had a peerless Texas Baptist pedigree. She grew up in Waco near the Baptist university (later Baylor) whose campus had been donated by her grandfather, J. W. Speight. Another grandfather, Judge J. R. Jenkins, was a founder of the Republic of Texas and of Baylor University at Independence. Her uncle, Rufus Burleson, was a longtime president of Baylor, and her father, Judge W. H. Jenkins, served on its board for fifty years. Her church membership was at powerful First Baptist of Waco where B. H. Carroll held sway, and her oldest sister married the most influential Texas Baptist pastor of them all, George Truett.

Annie Jenkins was a sensitive, garrulous child who was baptized when she was eleven years old. A sister recalls that she traveled with their father to teach at mission Sunday schools in Waco while she was still a teenager. [\[footnote\]](#) By the time she finished her bachelor's degree at Baylor in 1897, she was feeling the urge to embark upon a religious vocation, a significant enterprise: "I do feel in my heart that I must do something in the world. I do not care for honors for myself. O that I might be an honor and bring honor upon the Lord's name:" [\[footnote\]](#) During the following year she came closer to interpreting her urge as a "calling," but as a woman it was not clear to what end such a call would be directed beside teaching in a Christian school and that did not adequately fulfill her needs. A month apart in 1898 she wrote the following entries in her diary:
Hallie Jenkins Singleton, *A Glimpse Into the Christ Filled Life of Annie Jenkins Sallee, Missionary 1905-1945* (n.p., n.p.), p. 1.

Annie Jenkins Sallee, Diary, entry dated June 6, 1897, Jenkins-Sallee Papers, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas. The occasion was her graduation day from Baylor University.

O! that God would use me in bringing the lost ones to the Light. . . Lord, let this be my life work, if thou would'st only give me work in thy vineyard school-teaching would be a thing of the past.[\[footnote\]](#)
Ibid., September 12, 1898. (Underlining hers.)

I feel that to do work for the Lord is the greatest calling under the sun. I am happier in that work than anything else; there is no work that I now see by which I could make a living and I know of nothing except teaching school. I know that I could do some good teaching school, but nothing like as much as [I] would like. I am looking to the Lord to direct me.[\[footnote\]](#)
Ibid., October, 1898.

After teaching three years she followed her desire for a more direct religious vocation by enrolling in the Baptist Missionary Training School in Chicago, there being no such facility for women among Southern Baptists. Predictably, she reached a period of "agonized waiting upon the Lord"[\[footnote\]](#) at a summer youth encampment in 1903 and gave herself to the only strictly religious calling and vocation open to one of her sex: missionary work. While the decision brought release and peace temporarily, she discovered that it did not end her spiritual quest.
Singleton, p. 2.

Annie sailed for China in 1905 at age twenty-eight; her mission was to assist in establishing a Baptist center in the interior province of Honan. There she faced dilemmas common to missionaries: in China, a long period of language study prior to any undertaking; loneliness and homesickness; and the discovery that sin or imperfection haunted even those who feel they have given everything. She wrote remorsefully on the final day of 1905, ". . . even now, since I've been here I am not near the Lord all the time as I would like to be. I am so sinful—oh that my heart might be pure. . . ."[\[footnote\]](#) "Neither did the gift of self-sacrifice eliminate the pain of separation from loved ones. Touching diary entries list members of her large family, their stages of development, and relationship to her. "Well," she summed up her reflection, "I must be conceited to feel they all need me

so, but I am sure there is no place on earth I'd rather be and there is no place on earth, so far as I know where my life counts for so much as at home. I am not a bit discontented about being here. I know this is God's place for me, not my choosing, but His. I was willing to follow, hence I think it wrong for me to be sad about it when He is leading. I am happy to be here, but I am still human and very much so."[\[footnote\]](#)

Sallee, December 31, 1905.

Ibid., 1905 (no specific day of entry noted).

Another issue—not common to all missionaries, but an important decision for women in her position—presented itself to Annie in China. Eugene Sallee, a member of the Honan Baptist mission group, asked her to marry him. As a younger woman she had had several suitors and imagined that she would someday marry, but her acceptance of the missionary challenge was based on serving as a single person. Although missionary wives like Anne Bagby were able to exercise a ministerial role unlike laywomen or pastors' wives in America, they were generally not as active, independent, or visible as unmarried female missionaries. Wives were clearly part of a team, but the husband was the spokesman and primary missionary appointee. For example, when Laura Barton, a Texas missionary to China for five years, married Z. C. Taylor, a widower serving in Brazil, it was assumed she would move to Brazil rather than vice versa.[\[footnote\]](#) A missionary wife's domestic role was thought to be her first duty and mission work extra, whereas unmarried women could devote themselves single-heartedly to religious tasks.[\[footnote\]](#)

Carroll, p. 730 reads: ". . .the bride [Miss Barton], of course, giving up her work in China."

R. Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women in World Missions* (Grand Rapids, Mich., William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968; rev. ed., 1980), pp. 48-57.

Annie Jenkins recognized the compromise implied by marriage, and she resisted Mr. Sallee's entreaties for several months. "I don't want to marry," she stated clearly in her diary.

I told him I did not come to China for that. I came as a single missionary, and I could not think of giving up what I had so longed to do.[\[footnote\]](#)

Sallee, 1905 (no specific day noted).

I feel a single woman can do so much more work than a married one with house-hold cares. . . .I never did feel called upon to keep house for a man. I want to be in the work myself.[\[footnote\]](#)

Ibid., December 31, 1905.

But his attractiveness, the isolation of their foreign experience, and cultural expectations won the day. They married in 1906, her resistance having dwindled to instructing the minister to substitute the word "help" for "obey" in the vows they made.[\[footnote\]](#)

Ibid., September 18, 1906.

Part of the reason for Annie's succumbing to a partially domestic role lay in the discovery that she preferred operating in the institutions of the missionary compound, teaching and administering, rather than traveling and doing evangelistic work in the countryside. And home life having been such an important facet of her past experience, she no doubt sought to recreate a "nest" of her own. Missionaries commonly depended heavily on one another, but the alien nature of Chinese culture even heightened the situation. There they tended to build their homes close together or live in compounds which also included space or buildings for schools and worship. The Sallees eventually built a two-story home in Kaifeng, Honan, and completed it with fine Asian furnishings as well as many American conveniences.[\[footnote\]](#) Annie's early reticence toward Eugene Sallee was replaced with a mutual devotion that was enhanced not only by their cultural isolation, but also by their remaining childless.[\[footnote\]](#)

Personal interview with Hallie Jenkins Singleton, in Waco, Texas, February 4, 1976. Mrs. Singleton and her husband furnished a room in honor of her sister, Annie Jenkins Sallee, in the Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas. Mrs. Singleton still had Chinese rugs and vases that were gifts of Mrs. Sallee in her possession; a number of Mrs. Sallee's other things were destroyed in a fire at the Jenkins family home in Waco.

See particularly the correspondence of Annie J. Sallee to W. Eugene Sallee, Spring, 1929, when she was in the United States and he remained in China. Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

The whole interior mission station prospered between Annie's arrival in 1905 and the end of this study, 1920. She and Eugene were both good teachers and effective administrators; in a compound at important crossroads a mile from the capital city of the province, Kaifeng, they developed a seminary to train preachers, schools for boys and girls, and an industrial school where women engaged in crafts and learned Bible lessons. Mr. Sallee worked mainly with churches and the seminary, but was interested in wider programs and participated in agricultural reform, an attempt to assist the rural poor but one eventually equated with political action.[\[footnote\]](#) The operation of the schools for children and women were left in Mrs. Sallee's hands. She encouraged other women from the United States to join her, particularly single women who came to live in the dormitories and handle the boarding aspects of student life. Native Chinese women were also taught to supervise other women and to teach artisan skills. A young Chinese woman who had been employed as Annie's housekeeper and, as such, had learned to do needlework became a key instructor in the industrial school; a talented boy in the boarding school created the patterns from which the women worked to pay part of their schooling costs.[\[footnote\]](#)

William A. Brown, "The Protestant Rural Movement in China (1920-1937," *American Missionaries in China*, ed. Kwang-Ching Liu (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 228.

BS, October 11, 1911, pp. 9, 29.

Mission work in Asia necessitated the presence of women missionaries to approach native women—foreign men simply had no access to the secluded females of those cultures. (This special need was the main reason the prohibition against single women entering the mission field had been relaxed during the nineteenth century.)[\[footnote\]](#) Because only women could teach other women and because the process of instruction took years due to illiteracy and lack of familiarity with Christianity, American women trained "Bible women" from among the natives to assist them. Often these women started teaching when they knew little beyond a simple catechism, but they handled rudimentary instruction and were particularly valuable in "itinerating" country work. Training and working with these women was also a function of a female missionary like Annie Jenkins Sallee, who used both older women from the industrial school and, eventually, more well

trained young women who had been educated from childhood in mission schools as Bible women.

Beaver, pp. 59-86.

All teaching began at the most elementary level, whether done by missionaries or natives. Lessons in song were among the most attractive and best remembered. Two single women from Texas working in north China with Lottie Moon reported a typical journey in which they appealed to one "girl-wife" whose babies had died by telling her "that she might see her babies again" (in heaven).[\[footnote\]](#) Lessons were often drawn from something simple and at hand, as one of those women, Jewell Leggett, related:

BS, March 21, 1912, p. 11.

Once, while Miss Jeter was holding forth on idol worship, I plucked her sleeve and whispered, "You are leaning against a temple wall, and these people have never before had their gods attacked." For an answer she turned and drew on the wall the picture of a book, and said, "God has a book in which He has recorded the name of each of us. Every time we commit a sin He marks it down in this book, and at the judgment day He will judge us from it. And every time you bump your head to this idol He marks it down, for He says it is a sin to worship any god beside Him; there is no other."

[\[footnote\]](#)

Ibid.

The curiosity aroused by women missionaries in China, particularly when they traveled, created situations in which they also had the opportunity to teach men. Lottie Moon, before the turn of the century, still suffered from biblical and southern prohibitions against her doing so, but she supplied a legalistic solution to the problem by having men sit "unofficially" behind her and listen while she taught women.[\[footnote\]](#) Her biographer reports that a co-worker, Martha Crawford, "had been in China so long that she had forgotten all the handicaps that interpretations of scripture had thrown around the opportunities for women to teach the gospel, so she took the men in large classes."[\[footnote\]](#) Although they did not solicit the attention of men, most women missionaries did teach men when the situation presented itself. More than in the United States or other western countries,

women missionaries evangelized native Chinese men, obviously a function of the lack of workers, but also of the women's literacy and of the cultural differences—not just "difference," but superiority. The "otherness" of the Chinese, especially their lack of any knowledge of those things which the missionary deemed most important, provided a subconscious rationale for women to assume authority despite their sex. Within formal church structures, however, traditional ranking held constant: a native man, even one who was newly converted, took public roles in worship over any woman. Women did not hold formal preaching services nor administer the sacraments of baptism and communion, and they did not train preachers in the seminaries that formed.

Una Roberts Lawrence, *Lottie Moon* (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1927), pp. 141-142.

Ibid., p. 141.

Baptist women missionaries did experience enough latitude to answer many of their needs for a wider field of service. Annie Jenkins Sallee, like Anne Luther Bagby, fulfilled her calling by becoming primarily an educator; with the absence of children of her own, she administered several schools and a large staff. She engaged in entrepreneurial enterprises—selling handwork and rugs for the benefit of the mission—and promoted its projects actively in the Baptist press and in person during her stateside visits. She and Mr. Sallee returned to the United States in 1930 when he was asked to serve as secretary of the Foreign Mission Board, but after his sudden death in 1931, she went back to Kaifeng and continued with her work there until taken prisoner by the Japanese in 1941. She was repatriated the following year.

From invisible roles as wives and questionable status as single women, female missionaries gained in expertise and stature during the period of this study. Instead of having to be attached to some male's family, they gained the option of defining their own assignments, traveling alone, and living alone or only with other women. Although practice varied from station to station, they generally insisted upon (and men asked that they take) an active role in shaping the policy of the mission. When a male superior on leave made a decision in 1885 regarding the mission in which Lottie Moon taught, she wrote an ultimatum to the Southern Baptist committee in charge of the work:

Here in Tengchow the ladies have always been admitted on equal terms with the gentlemen of the mission when meeting to consider the matters pertaining to the conduct of the work here. . . .At one time, as you know, the mission was left entirely in the hands of women. . . .To exclude the married women from the meetings might be unwise, but it could hardly be deemed unjust, as they are represented by their husbands. To exclude the unmarried ladies would be a most glaring piece of injustice in my opinion. To such exclusion I would never submit, and retain my self-respect.[\[footnote\]](#)
Ibid., pp. 135-136.

The committee reversed its decision in favor of the egalitarian pattern already established.

Although married missionary women were viewed by the supporting boards as the assisting member of a team and many were limited by household and childrearing responsibilities, they still had the opportunity to exercise a more varied ministry than church women in America. Because their husbands were often traveling or engrossed in church and school projects of their own, women became sole administrators of the work among women and children, developing schools and craft industries and training native workers. The lack of guidelines and precedents and the distance from cautious maintainers of denominational tradition back in the States enabled them to define daily ministries on their own terms. Denied pulpits, they found a wide audience for their written reports and shaped Americans' perceptions of foreign people and places. Many were more assertive when they returned to America because they were accustomed to forging new paths and because they were seized with the urgency and immensity of their task. Even though some Texans still frowned on Mina Everett's sharing her evangelistic fervor with a church audience in 1895, most churches accepted returned missionaries as their first women speakers. Soon after the turn of the century these women—especially single women, widows, or women on leave without their husbands—were commonly invited to give reports to church groups including males. Not only were they allowed to speak, but within the missionary context assertion and audacity in a female was actually encouraged. After a visit with Lottie Moon in 1903, J. B. Cranfill proudly reported that she would not hesitate, at any time, "to tell the story of the Cross to any inquiring soul of either sex."[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, February 12, 1903, p. 3.

Missionary work offered nineteenth-century women a context for exercising both power and nurture that was matched only by their responsibility in childrearing. It provided a blend of manipulation and altruism that harmonized with the progressive outlook of most Americans prior to World War I but took on the tinge of self-righteousness and chauvinism in the secular, disunified, and less innocent world that emerged after the war, one in which commonly held convictions that had underpinned the evangelical missionary movement were questioned or discredited. The women of this study, however, should not be judged by this altered worldview that took half of the twentieth century to make its imprint on national policy and psyche. They should, more appropriately, be credited with their vision of a better world, their desire to participate fully in bringing it about, and, finally, their actually leaving the familiar and secure for the unknown and arduous. Kenneth Scott Latourette, Yale historian, thus described the missionary's complex position:

Bigoted and narrow they frequently were, occasionally superstitious, and sometimes domineering and serenely convinced of the superiority of Western culture and of their own particular form of Christianity. When all that can be said in criticism of the missionaries has been said, however, and it is not a little, the fact remains that nearly always at considerable and very often at great sacrifice they came to China, and in unsanitary and uncongenial surroundings, usually with insufficient stipends, often at the cost of their own lives or of lives that were dearer to them than their own, labored indefatigably for an alien people who did not want them or their message. Whatever may be the final judgment on the major premises, the methods, and the results of the missionary enterprise, the fact cannot be gainsaid that for sheer altruism and heroic faith here is one of the bright pages in the history of the race. [\[footnote\]](#)

Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1929), pp. 824-825.

It is an ironic historical note that basically conservative women created the focus on world missions, "the first feminist movement in North America,"

[\[footnote\]](#) and unleashed a creative force that affected the liberation of women in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, as well as their own. Beaver, rev. ed., p. 11.

Introduction

For those Baptist women who took their religious commitment seriously, Christian faith and practice was not limited to church services and missionary societies. They believed that all of their activities were informed and transformed by a confession of the lordship of Jesus Christ. Whether they washed dishes, went to school, chose a husband, tended a child, or took a job, they were to conform to the ideals of their faith both in attitude and practice.

Texas women who lived between 1880 and 1920 shared many characteristics with their sisters in the Deep South and some even with those in the Northeast, both of whom have been studied more thoroughly than they, but the late frontier conditions and the thin layer of tradition and social custom present in Texas produced some variations in the female model. This chapter will analyze what Baptists believed that model to be and whether their lives actually conformed to the pattern. It will include consideration of feminine characteristics, education, marriage and motherhood, and civic duty or interaction with society in general.

Female Characteristics

Female characteristics. "True womanhood," a model of self-sacrificial piety that motivated domestic and maternal excellence among northern American women in the early nineteenth century and maintained a remnant of patriarchal structure in the South beyond the Civil War, trickled down to Texas only in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and made its appearance in Baptist sermons, poems, didactic tales, and, especially, obituaries. Prior to that time the mode of living for Texas females had been dictated by the need to survive, with whatever thin overlay of culture or manners survived the hardship of migration. The exigencies of frontier life demanded informality and physical activity rather than etiquette and passive submission, but the chivalrous myth of perfect women selflessly guarding the innocent and submitting to the powerful captured their impoverished imaginations at a time and place in which it was particularly anachronistic. Its unattainable, romantic quality undoubtedly contributed to its popularity, much as glamorous Hollywood musicals appealed during the Depression of the 1930s.

In 1895 a Baptist school girl's scrapbook contained a clipping that outlined the "beautiful girlhood" to which she aspired:

"cheerful, but never boisterous; happy, but not thoughtless; gay, but not giddy. She is a peacemaker, the sure helper, the ready sympathizer, the active worker of her family. Is anything wanted? She is the one to supply it; and she can do all that is to be done for the comfort of every one else. Eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, hands to the incapable; loving, unselfish, energetic, industrious; she has no ambition outside of her home circle. . . .She knows neither idleness nor repining; neither the pangs of unsatisfied ambition, nor the pain of passion, of envy, or jealousy, or hate. Love with her is sunshine, not flame, and home is her altar. . . .[\[footnote\]](#)"

Baptist Standard (Waco), November 14, 1895, p. 14. Hereafter in these notes this publication will be referred to as "BS." The place of publication from inception until February 3, 1898, was Waco, Texas; from that date it was published in Dallas, Texas.

Naturally a childhood of such training and outlook produced a "lady" that fit this prize-winning definition:

To be a lady means, rightly, to be a gentlewoman who shows by her every word and action a sweet and gentle dignity, with a gracious charm of manner; a woman whose heart is pure and true, who is tender toward all suffering, who sympathizes with those in trouble, and is ever ready to give that which costs her some effort and self-denial. A lady thinks no work derogatory, and no one is deemed too low to receive courtesy and kindness. She is pure and good in every detail of life, a true friend, and a "ministering angel" in sorrow and sickness.[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, March 20, 1913, pp.

Besides presenting a demeanor of happiness, courtesy, and gentleness, women were expected to demonstrate their character with self-denying acts of service toward others--a definition of an idealized mother-figure.

Nowhere was this model of self-sacrificing perfection applied more often than to women in death or invalidism--both of which occurred mysteriously and frequently in that time of limited and primitive medical practice. Dealing with death and illness was a common ordeal and was still carried out in the home and community among family members and citizens of all ages, including children, rather than in institutions such as hospitals and funeral homes, removed from everyday life. A firm, literal belief in resurrection, reunion with lost loved ones, and relief from suffering clearly empowered women to bear pain and to welcome release from its tyranny, but the repetitious tales of death-bed cheer also indicated a need of the survivors to bolster their own faith and to perpetuate the ideal of redemption through suffering.

A favorite story was that of Fannie Crosby, the blind composer of hymns who thanked the physician who prescribed the treatment that ruined her sight because "it was not a blunder on God's part," but a plan that enabled her to concentrate and write the songs that could never have been written "if [she] had been hindered by the distraction of seeing."[\[footnote\]](#) Incidents of women crying out in their pain, "Lord Jesus, thou art all and I am nothing," while reassuring loved ones with "Don't cry, I shall soon be at rest," were commonly related in obituaries.[\[footnote\]](#) This spirit of resignation and faith was not just developed over a lifetime, but was somehow bound up in female nature because girls displayed it. Little Lockie, who worked for the

orphans' home "all her bright young days till death came...on her death bed desired that her medicine bottles be cleaned, sold, and the proceeds sent to the orphans."[\[footnote\]](#) Another beautiful little girl who inspired everyone's love was taken from her parents by death because "she was too pure for this world," her pastor reported.[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, January 22, 1914, p. 11.

BS, February 8, 1900, p. 16; *BS*, August 13, 1903, p. 16.

BS, December 1, 1892, p. 1.

BS, November 17, 1892, p. 8.

The analogy between women's suffering and that of Jesus is inescapable, if not explicit, in the above stories and in the following eulogy of Elizabeth B. Paxton of Cleburne, Texas, who died in 1894:

For years before she died she suffered from an incurable and exceedingly painful disease. And I have the word from those who were with her most, that from first to last, she never spoke a word that was even remotely akin to complaint or murmur. Ah, she had sure-enough religion! It was her business to suffer, and to wait for release from pain. If her life was beautiful her death was more lovely still. Without a doubt, without a fear, she reached out her hand to God and He drew her to Himself.[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, May 24, 1894, p. 2.

Baptists appear to have expanded the common romantic literary genre to give a feminine balance to their patriarchal religious system. They would adamantly deny such a charge, but they used women in general and mothers in particular to complete the androgyny of the godhead in the way that Roman Catholics used Mary, the mother of Jesus.[\[footnote\]](#) All across the South, the sentiments of obituaries and sketches like these were transmitted first into hymns and eventually into country songs in which Mother (as womankind or a female principle) suffers, intercedes, and waits in heaven. This practice of Roman Catholics is one with which Baptists disagree as much as they do the existence of papal authority for the ostensible reason that both are extra-biblical.

But the idealization of women took a form other than the fantasy of a perfect parent and the need for a suffering surrogate; it also took on a sexual component with women providing a characteristic opposite or

complementary to one commonly associated with men. The dichotomy of weak and strong was a metaphor often used by both men and women in delineating their differences and separate spheres. One minister described women as weak and powerless, therefore particularly grateful to God for lifting them above a chattel state and to men for giving them protection, provision, and companionship.[\[footnote\]](#) Women agreed that "in some respects they were exceedingly weak," were "bought with a price," and were limited to "small works," but they liked to remind themselves that these efforts could be enobled and expanded until "eternity alone could estimate the good" derived from them.[\[footnote\]](#) They even celebrated the passivity that left them pliable:

BS, May 4, 1897, p. 1.

BS, February 14, 1895, p. 7.

We are but organs mute, till a master touches the keys--

Verily vessels of earth into which God poureth the wine.

Harps are we, silent harps that have hung in the willow trees,

Dumb till our heart-strings swell and break with a pulse divine.[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, April 4, 1895, p. 7.

No doubt "mute" was an excess attributable to poetic license, but women often reminded one another that to be womanly was to be "quiet and modest," not "forward, officious, brash or loud."[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, February 14, 1895, p. 7

Neither was the ideal woman to let intellectual ambition distract her from attention to the simpler duties of life nor "deep questions of the hour. . .trouble the serene loveliness of her thoughts."[\[footnote\]](#) These pursuits were more natural and becoming to a man; in a woman, "sweetness was better than cleverness."[\[footnote\]](#) As though the two qualities could not possibly coexist within a person—a devastating indictment of Christian men—it was explained that women did not "reason"; they "loved."[\[footnote\]](#) These qualities, linked with their intuitiveness and sensitivity, provided women with that which made them superior: their "heart power."

"Nobody," a minister summed up, "nobody but God can love like a woman."[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, July 22, 1897, p. 10; *BS*, November 14, 1895, p. 14.

BS, August 20, 1903, p. 10.

BS, July 30, 1903, p. 10.

BS, March 11, 1897, p. 1.

The plethora of sermons, stories and character sketches that upheld woman's virtue and self-abnegation and set her apart from men diminished in Baptist newspapers soon after the turn of the century. The focus on women turned primarily to their religious activities—their competence in organizing for missions and aiding men in the task of world evangelism. The sexes were still discussed as distinct entities, but with many of the same goals and skills, especially within the church. Maternity was deemed as important as ever, but it was dealt with in more objective, less romantic terms. With this change in emphasis, women's record for goodness was viewed as equipping them to help shape society rather than to remain aloof from it, a situation in which both intellect and physical vigor were encouraged as assets.

Actually, women in Texas had never ceased to be physically active. Rural women helped with crops and livestock, both of which demanded outdoor exertion beyond their household tasks. Well into the twentieth century, even those who lived in towns often kept a garden, a cow, and some chickens on their "city lot." Annie Jenkins Sallee's family lived in town (Waco) and were middle-class, but after taking her absent mother's place at home, she wrote, "I kept house and I verily believe I never did so much work in all my life. Housecleaning, cooking, feeding the "Billy," feeding the rabbits, gathering eggs and general errand boy (rather girl)." [\[footnote\]](#) During childhood farm girls did most of the same chores boys did--chopping and picking cotton and milking cows--and girls routinely participated in active outdoor sports like swimming, horseback riding, climbing trees, and riding a "wheel" when it came in vogue.[\[footnote\]](#) "Playing football was the limit because boys put hands on me and knocked me down," explained Hallie Jenkins Singleton of Waco, but she did so many other things boys did she wanted her mother to let her wear pants "the worst way."[\[footnote\]](#)

Annie Jenkins Sallee, Diary, entry dated July 21, 1897. Jenkins-Sallee Papers, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Personal interviews with Mrs. Hollis Manly in Abilene, Texas, February 26, 1975; Mrs. A. R. Holten in Abilene, Texas, February 27, 1975; Hallie Jenkins Singleton in Waco, Texas, February 4, 1976. All these women grew up around the turn of the century in Granbury, Huckaby, and Waco, Texas, respectively. Also see *BS*, September 30, 1897, and Annie Jenkins Sallee, Diary, entry dated July 10, 1897.

Interview with Hallie J. Singleton, February 4, 1976, Waco, Texas.

Contrary to myth and fashion, Texas Baptist women never ceased to be competent and intelligent as well as physically active. Annie Sallee praised her sister Josephine Truett for being "so calm and capable. . . everyone felt comfortable just to have her there."[\[footnote\]](#) In the 1890s Elli Moore was singled out in a complimentary sketch because "she was a great manager, especially in times of emergency. . . persistent in carrying out her plans and wishes and. . . very independent. . . generally preferring to wait on herself."[\[footnote\]](#) "My mother wanted us to be independent," claimed Georgia Smith, born in 1890 to Rochelle Robinson, the daughter of Fannie Breedlove Davis, first president of Texas Baptist women's mission organization.[\[footnote\]](#)

Sallee, Diary, February 27, 1928, at her mother's last illness.

BS, July 11, 1895, p. 7.

Personal interview with Georgia Robinson Smith in Austin, Texas, May 19, 1980.

Quite the opposite of upholding contrived sweetness or silence, Baptists described insight and direct speech as virtues. "Aunt Sallie" Malone, considered nearly a saint by Baptist Standard editor James B. Cranfill, was nonetheless "frank and outspoken, sometimes even blunt. . . If she discovered that a man is a fraud and a hypocrite, he is sure to soon find out that she knows him for what he is worth."[\[footnote\]](#) "Miss Bell" Grover was another Baptist woman with "a faculty of keen discrimination," who shot "[verbal] arrows that hit the mark, bringing down the game."[\[footnote\]](#) Aiming at the same commonsensical model for his daughter, Annie Sallee's father advised: "Curb your 'sentimentality'--hold a severe check on it."[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, August 28, 1902, p. 6.

BS, May 28, 1903, p. 7.

W. H. Jenkins to Annie Jenkins, March 20, 1899. Jenkins-Sallee Papers, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Despite the popularity of the Southern woman-on-a-pedestal myth, it never fit Texas lower- and middle-class women; the conditions and demands of their lives required a different response. The struggle to come to terms with the disjunction between that myth and reality was addressed by novelist Dorothy Scarborough, a Texan born in 1878, a Baylor graduate and teacher, an Oxford scholar, and a professor of English at Columbia University.

[\[footnote\]](#) Her novel, *The Wind*, published in 1925, gives two women's responses to the west Texas frontier of the 1880s. Letty, the apparent heroine, is a delicate, mannered beauty from Virginia, thrust by tragic circumstances out of her bucolic childhood home to live as the ward of a cousin in Sweetwater, Texas. Letty's female antithesis is Cora, "thoroughly a woman," but brash, egotistical, and aggressive. Letty's nervous, sensitive nature and her expectation that others will take care of her leave her totally defenseless against the rawness of her new life, and she is mentally and physically destroyed by its symbolic essence, the wind. The "climate that so terrifies and dwarfs [Letty's] spirits and energies," however, is an "intoxicating stimulus" to Cora, who survives--not with a pedestal image intact, but by dint of a fierce, dominating spirit that is a match for nature's force.[\[footnote\]](#)

Miss Scarborough was Annie Jenkins Sallee's neighbor in Waco and classmate at Baylor. Both their fathers were trustees of Baylor University; both had older sisters who married pastors who served as presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention (Dorothy Scarborough's sister Douglass married George W. McDaniel, Jr., whose primary pastorate was Richmond, Virginia). Dorothy Scarborough's papers are in the Texas Collection, Baylor University, and merit closer examination by some scholar.

Dorothy Scarborough, *The Wind* (New York: Harper, 1925; reprint ed., Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1979), quotes from pp. 94, 117.

This juxtaposition was a fictional exaggeration, but it demonstrated the total inadequacy of a passive, self-effacing feminine model in the Texas setting, as well as the real possibility of female egotism and strength. At the turn of

the century Baptists found themselves equivocating between the two options, clinging nostalgically to the outdated ideal while experimenting with new powers and capabilities.

By 1895 there were frequent references to the emergence of a "new woman," but she was usually identified in the Texas Baptist newspapers of that time as one who exemplified frivolity rather than demanding rights. This version of the new woman traded her interest in home and church for a preoccupation with "fine dress and all the gaudy trappings of social life." [\[footnote\]](#) Although her appearance indicated some anxiety over a shift in morality and a rise in income and class among Baptists or Texans in general, she drew more humorous asides than serious confrontation. Characterized as "Miss Bessie Societyqueen," she sought constant pleasure among rough company at dances or devoted all her energy to club work. [\[footnote\]](#) The type who demanded expanded privileges were discounted as "old maids," trying to make others as unhappy as themselves by organizing movements for causes as silly as "the right of women to wear beards." [\[footnote\]](#) These new women, Baptist Standard editor Cranfill concluded, were just like "the first and oldest woman who was easily beguiled by Satan" except Eve wore fig leaves and they wore bloomers. [\[footnote\]](#)
BS, January 30, 1902, p. 4.
BS, March 1, 1900, p. 5.
BS, July 4, 1895, p. 4; BS, April 18, 1895, p. 4.
BS, September 19, 1895, p. 4.

The "woman question" touched Southern Baptists, but as women of conservative orientation, not many responded by either embracing high society or becoming militant feminists. Instead, they expanded their roles in education and organization, utilizing both to promote their traditional belief structure. Although they claimed to be simply "the old woman adjusted to the times," [\[footnote\]](#) they actually experienced a growing sense of equality with men, but their reaction was to insist that men meet their standards rather than their attempting to become more mannish. Indicative of this trend was an editorial in the 1897 Baptist Standard on "Fallen Women and Fallen Men" that drew more response from women than any other substantial or potentially controversial article printed between 1880 and 1920. [\[footnote\]](#) Women denied (as had the editor) that it was more

shameful for a woman to commit a sexual offense than for a man to do so. They called for the same rehabilitation and acceptance of "reformed women" "that society had always granted "reformed men." Mrs. J. L. Vredenburg succinctly summed up their message in an Austin speech: *BS*, December 24, 1914, p. 1.
BS, April 1, 1897, n.p.; responses continued in the *BS* through April, May and June, 1897.

. . .there is no double standard with God. His laws are the same for men and women, the penalty the same. What is right for one, is right for the other; what is wrong for one is wrong for the other; there is no sex in God's code.

[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, February 24, 1898, p. 11.

The radical element of their emancipation lay in their insisting that a single standard of morality applied to both sexes and that it closely matched the loving, faithful, self-sacrificing ideal associated with women. Although it may bespeak a measure of defensiveness, the following statement by a woman also bears the mark of self-confidence and of congruence between Christian ideology and its expression in women's lives:

Did you ever think how Christ Himself is a type of the feminine nature? Do not misunderstand me, not an effeminate Christ, but a manly Christ, taking the feminine attributes, the heroism of the Son of Man is the heroism of ideal womanhood and motherhood. The very virtues which He lifted to the Mount, were precisely the same virtues which the past ages had scorned as feminine[:] meekness, poverty of spirit, peacemaking, purity.[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, August 28, 1913, p. 15.

Self-satisfaction did not run so deep that women felt they had monopolized Christian virtues. Another writer, for instance, emphasized spiritual equality by choosing attributes associated with each sex to describe a common moral standard:

The glory of Christianity is that it is fitted to make both men and women stronger, braver, more gentle to each other and to their suffering brethren, and more loyal to the Divine Master, who recognized in men and women alike the capacity for spiritual life.[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, December 28, 1911, p. 9.

These "new" Baptist women did not imagine or propose that the pursuit of a single Christian ideal would eliminate psychological or occupational differences between the sexes any more than it would the physiological. They assumed (even preferred) that a diversity in orientation and activities along sexual lines would continue to be manifested. Particularly was that true regarding women's maternal role; their model of Christian womanhood did not exclude "loving babies and loving home."[\[footnote\]](#) But they celebrated their identity as women and enlarged their definition of that identity without divesting themselves of their "sacred canopy."

BS, December 24, 1914, p. 1.

Education

Education. From the opening of their first school, Baylor University, in 1846, Texas Baptists have provided for the education of females. J. M. Carroll explained that the state "probably had as little as any other State in the South, and much less than some, of that old spirit that argues that the education of boys is of far more importance than that of girls."[\[footnote\]](#) Waco University, which became Baylor University when it consolidated with the male department of the Independence school in 1861, pioneered in coeducation, that is, instructing women in the same classes with men—a bold experiment that was given a trial period of ten years then unanimously declared a success.[\[footnote\]](#) The only thing more important than a girl's education was her being a Christian, said one Baptist in 1896, and another pointed out to parents that it was a goal well worth the sacrifice of their own comfort or investments.[\[footnote\]](#) Throughout the nineteenth century Texas Baptists insisted that women's biblical rights included "the right to think and render intelligent service"[\[footnote\]](#) even though they limited those areas of service.

J. M. Carroll, A History of Texas Baptists (Dallas: Baptist Standard Publishing Co., 1923), p. 396.

Ibid., pp. 732-733.

BS, January 9, 1896, p. 15; BS, January 17, 1895, p. 8.

BS, January 21, 1897, p. 14. (Underlining mine.)

The commitment to females' education and declaration of the absence of prejudice, however, were not tantamount to the provision of equal education for girls. The female department of Baylor at Independence was a stepsister to the male department throughout their combined history, 1846 to 1886.

Records of state Baptist convention proceedings indicate that "educationally, twice as much space and attention were given to the boys as were given to the girls."[\[footnote\]](#) Trustees of the school tried unsuccessfully to withdraw from the oversight of the Baptist State Convention in 1869 and were sharply critical of the denomination's lack of interest in the "intellectual cultivation of our daughters."[\[footnote\]](#) Although President Rufus Burleson of Waco University welcomed women into the classrooms with men in 1865 (it was an economic move in unstable

times), those women graduated Maid of Arts or Mistress of Arts rather than Bachelor of Arts.[\[footnote\]](#)

Carroll, p. 396.

Robert A. Baker, The Blossoming Desert (Waco, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1970), p. 130.

L. R. Elliott, ed., Centennial Story of Texas Baptists (Chicago: Hammond Press, 1936), p. 157.

Discrimination and disinterest in female education stemmed from a lingering conviction that "riddles of life, of society, morality and humanity" did not trouble a girl's thoughts and that "intellectual ambition" produced a "cold, unloved and unhelpful woman."[\[footnote\]](#) Even if a girl were bright and educated (the line of reasoning went), her cultivation would be wasted because once out in the world, "no one would ever ask or know whether she got good grades in algebra or Latin"; they would only notice if she were gentle and refined.[\[footnote\]](#) Within educational circles, this spirit was manifested in teaching girls practical information like domestic arts, good health, frugality, and neatness rather than philosophical or analytical subjects. The woman's pages of Baptist newspaper in the 1880s show that the training produced women who were interested in pious, inspirational aspects of religion and, beyond that, in household hints, gardening facts, livestock information, and recipes.

BS, November 14, 1895, p. 14; *BS*, July 22, 1897, p. 10.

BS, August 7, 1902, p. 11.

The most persuasive argument used to combat this narrow attitude toward female education was woman's important role in training her children and maintaining high standards in the home. As rural society broke down in the second half of the nineteenth century and the spheres of the sexes became more clearly divided—income production for men and domestic life for women—the idea of a girl's being trained to fill her role with professional competence became more common. It took firm root in the Baptist mind because of the importance of the home in their theological scheme of ordering all aspects of one's life to fit a biblical pattern. They believed a man was the head of the family, but for all practical purposes, his wife carried out the day-to-day management of the home and family and she needed to do it well.

A short story written for the Baptist Standard in 1892 illustrated the growing acceptance of this rationale for providing women not just with minimal schooling, but with a college education. The story begins with Farmer Craighead insisting that his daughter Fannie can do no better than to follow her mother's example: unspoiled by "grammar, and algebra, and Latin and such stuff," "Mrs. Craighead applies herself industriously to her cooking and housekeeping. "Hifalutin 'cademies and colleges," according to Farmer Craighead, were "makin' butterflies out of gals what God intended to be helpmeets for their husbands." A visit to the home of the Craigheads' son George and his college-educated wife Telula opens the farmer's eyes to the advantages of an education for a housewife and mother. Telula, having easily mastered the techniques of cooking and cleaning, adds dimensions of refinement and intelligence to their homelife. Her children are thoughtfully trained and her influence for good is felt throughout their neighborhood. "I'd rather risk an educated girl, though ignorant of the kitchen, if she had pluck," George confides to his father; "if anybody on earth needs to understand natural philosophy, Christianity, and hygiene, it's a housekeeper, a wife and mother." Predictably, Farmer Craighead, convinced that there was no more worthy recipient of a higher education than a young woman, sends Fannie to Baylor. [\[footnote\]](#)
BS, July 14, 1892, p. 6; *BS*, July 21, 1892, p. 6.

Just as the domestic sphere was delegated solely to women in the nineteenth century, culture and the arts were also appropriated by them as men generally narrowed the range of male pursuits more to matters economic, scientific, and academic. The curricula of Baptist female academies reflected this affinity of women and the arts, and most schools offered instruction in drawing, painting, and both vocal and instrumental music. Student recitals and concerts were popular entertainments in the small towns where the schools were located. Besides the arts, domestic and otherwise, courses were given in religion, languages, math, science, and history, but the assumption was that the fruits of these academic pursuits "would be largely hidden from the public in the modest lives of the girls as they. . .take their unpublished places in the sweet homes they are to help build." [\[footnote\]](#) Homemaker and mother was clearly the vocation most nineteenth-century Baptist schoolgirls expected to fulfill; their other possibilities were limited to teaching school and performing music.

BS, June 15, 1897, p. 10.

In the 1890s changing social conditions and an economic depression introduced a wider range of careers for women and the notion that all of them should learn to be self-supporting. The occupations suggested to the 1894 graduates of Baylor Female College were those identified as "particularly adapted to women": florist, confectioner, bookkeeper, cashier, engraver, author, bee-keeper, poultry-keeper, and laundress. A woman was discouraged from undertaking law, medicine, or any business or profession "that causes her to principally deal with men."[\[footnote\]](#) The politician who made the speech claimed he was primarily concerned with giving women wider fields of usefulness and more opportunities for happiness. May Asbury, writing for the Standard in 1895, was motivated by economic necessity: "The time may come," she warned other women, "when you will be called upon to take up the battle of life alone, and with no idea how to do it." She suggested that parents determine their daughter's interests, "then give her every chance possible as you would your son and teach her that no honest work is degrading." She saw no fault in depending on male relatives for support, but had learned from experience that that source could fail. Her message was derivative of the one being proclaimed by feminists, but it was one Baptists were just beginning to hear:

BS, August 2, 1894, p. 3.

Young women[,] take this affair in your own hand and let there be an insurrection in all prosperous families in this land and country on the part of the daughters of this day demanding knowledge in occupations and styles of business by which you may be your own defense and earn your own support if all fatherly, husbandly and brotherly hands forever fail.[\[footnote\]](#)
BS, July 4, 1895, p. 2.

The nineteenth-century suggestion that, first, girls were educable and, second, they would put that education to good use in their domestic pursuits, developed in the early twentieth century into the belief that females were perhaps even males' peers in the intellectual realm. "Less than fifty years ago it was really a question whether women could. . . learn like men," recalled J. B. Gambrell in 1915;[\[footnote\]](#) "within memory of all of you men have conceded that a woman could take [an]. . . education just as

well as men," adjoined E. C. Routh in a graduation address that same year. [\[footnote\]](#) One Baptist man agreed with an unnamed German observer who said that American women had actually outdistanced men in "general culture and the higher intellectual powers" because males' absorption in business life diminished their intellect and caused them to view education in a superficial manner. [\[footnote\]](#) Another attributed the fact that "women are smarter than men" to their docility and respect for authority; men's independence and resistance to authority stood in the way of their learning. [\[footnote\]](#) The latter is indicative of the fact that the writer (an unidentified college professor) equated intelligence with unoriginal diligence.

BS, September 30, 1915, p. 12.

BS, July 8, 1915, p. 25.

BS, July 2, 1914, p. 2.

BS, October 31, 1912, p. 24.

Some feared that the recognition of women's intellectual capacities would bring about the destruction of the home and family but after the turn of the century, Texas Baptists generally assumed that mental activity was a providential substitute for the muscular work that had consumed women's time in the past. Education was the tool that would enable Christian women to deal with the complexity forced upon both sexes by modernity and to assist men in the monumental evangelistic task to which they both were committed. Although women were encouraged to attend first to the moral phase of their training, they were occasionally urged to enhance that with education at world-renowned universities. This unprecedented suggestion was made on the assumption that interaction at "great centers of life and culture" fostered world-wide sympathies and a deeper sense of "the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man," [\[footnote\]](#) corresponding with the outward thrust of missionary interest that had seized the denomination.

BS, August 21, 1913, p. 5.

Within their own schools, Baptists refined the idea of what it meant to be an educated woman. From an emphasis on domestic arts, music, art, religion, and a smattering of "academic" subjects, they added a strong literary focus in the 1890s, including recitation and oration. Girls commonly wrote compositions on a moral theme to read at public gatherings; for example,

Annie Jenkins gave a speech entitled "A Moral Character, the only basis of Success" at her 1897 Baylor University graduation.^[footnote] Women were admitted in science lectures and laboratories in 1893 when Baylor began building a legitimate science program,^[footnote] and they took part in Bible classes with expertise. A woman's essay on "The Rainbow," written for B. H. Carroll's Bible class at Baylor in 1894, was reprinted in the Baptist Standard as "one of the ablest on this or any kindred subject."^[footnote] The new century brought an increased interest in health and hygiene; current events received more attention than they had previously, especially the events leading to and participation in World War I.

BS, July 1, 1897, pp. 10-11.

BS, February 2, 1893, p. 5.

BS, January 18, 1894, p. 2.

Baylor Female College, removed from Independence to Belton in 1886, did not accrue a financial endowment nor develop graduate programs as did Baylor University, but it built a substantial physical plant with several stone buildings during this period and was still on the upswing in 1920. The fact that it offered single-sex education and stressed a traditional female model made it a popular option, especially for rural girls. Owing principally to the work of Elli Moore Townsend, Baylor Female College introduced the "Cottage Home," a boarding house (later dormitory) run at low cost by the girls who occupied it, thus enabling poor girls to obtain a higher education. "For years and years," she pointed out in 1897, "the brethren have provided a way for poor young men who were anxious for it to get an education, and especially have board and mess halls and other means been devised to help poor young preachers. But who has cared for poor girls?"^[footnote] Mrs. Townsend cared and made "Our Baylor" a special cause of the Baptist women of Texas.

BS, July 15, 1897, p. 10.

The intense evangelical atmosphere at Baylor College caused one professor to call it "a mission plant," ^[footnote] but women who answered that call had to leave Texas for post-graduate and specific mission training. In 1904 some of those women began attending classes in the Baptist seminary connected with Baylor University in Waco. When the seminary moved to Fort Worth in 1910, Texas Baptist Women Mission Workers determined to

build a training school/dormitory for women on its campus. The facility was completed in 1915 and, appropriately, the gala celebration was presided over entirely by women.[\[footnote\]](#) Its students took courses taught by the seminary faculty on the English Bible, church history, Sunday school pedagogy, and ethics; they had separate classes, taught by women, in missions, domestic science, piano, and education. Field work was assigned in a settlement house in the packing district of Fort Worth.[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, April 30, 1914, p. 2.

BS, September 30, 1915 (several articles).

Ibid., p. 14.

The two all-female institutions—Baylor College in Belton and the Training School at the Seminary in Fort Worth—were a particular source of pride and vicarious pleasure to the Baptist women in the state who donated money to build and sustain them. They visited the sites with a proprietary interest of "coming home" and took a keen interest in the students, with whom they shared the satisfying experience of women reaching out to women.

Wider opportunity for and acceptance of women in higher education in general provided career options beyond the menial, assisting tasks suggested as appropriate for them in the 1890s; but with the exception of the seminary and the education and music schools, few women availed themselves of the professional departments Baylor University added in the first three decades of the twentieth century.[\[footnote\]](#) Women sought better training in the fields in which they were already working—mission work, musicianship, and teaching—but they hesitated to develop new career areas for themselves. An article extolling the service a woman doctor could perform in the mission field indicated Baptists believed that women could handle medical education and practice elementary medicine (skillfully enough for foreign patients), but no Texas Baptist woman filled that role. [\[footnote\]](#) In another story, dated 1916, a girl defended going to college by explaining, "But, Dad, you know. . .I want to study law and be president of the United States some day!" When she stopped joking and "continued seriously," she explained that a college education would help "whether I teach or work in the store," the real possibilities she considered.[\[footnote\]](#)

The professional schools included medicine (1903), pharmacy (1904), dentistry (1915), education (1919), law (1920), business (1923), and music (1925).

BS, January 18, 1912, pp. 14-15.

BS, January 13, 1916, p. 2.

Part of the reason women failed to move into new occupational areas was the practical restriction on combining a career with married life. There was no moral censure of a woman who chose to remain single and have a career, but if she married, it was assumed that making a home for her husband and children would fill the majority of her time. Dorothy Scarborough, a novelist, scholar, Baylor graduate, and professor at Columbia University, was admired for pursuing that life—almost a calling since it capitalized on her God-given intelligence—but the pursuit precluded marriage and motherhood.

The traditional choice of wife and mother was still upheld as the loftiest position to which girls could aspire, but they were encouraged to enhance that role with a well-developed intelligence. One woman wrote that the "mental kingdom within" expanded the boundaries imposed by the walls of her house. "Escaping into the realm of books" made her a better guide for her children and conversationalist/companion for her husband. [\[footnote\]](#) Another woman, defensive about her old-fashioned life compared to a woman who had achieved success as a musician, was told, *BS*, July 30, 1914, p. 9.

"You are a queen. . . . You have a happy home, a thoughtful and intelligent husband, and bright-faced, sweet-voiced children. How can such blessings be even distantly compared with a life like mine? My pride, my ambitions, my aesthetic loves are always satiated, but ah, my dear friend, it is all empty here," and [the musician] laid her slender jeweled finger over her heart.

[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, November 20, 1913, p. 22.

At the end of the period of this study, 1920, Baptists were committed to women's education, provided that education had a strong moral dimension to supplement the mental and physical:

Educate the body alone, and you have an Amazon. Educate the mind alone and you have an atheist. Educate the soul alone and you have a fanatic. But combine these three in Christian culture and you have a symphony which will be "a joy forever."[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, August 28, 1913, p. 15.

By 1920 Baptists acknowledged no theoretical limitations to a woman's intellectual possibilities—to her advancing her education and using it in any honorable field. But the practical restriction of her having to choose between that and marriage and motherhood was insurmountable for most. Sentiment and biology, if not moral conviction, still kept most firmly enthroned as "queens of the home."

Marriage and Motherhood

Despite their claim that sexual relations were clearly governed by biblical commands regarding the domination of men and subjection of women, Baptist females' interaction with males was predictably more complex than those directives. Beginning with courtship, women were alternately described as both victimized and controlling. The emphasis of advice to girls during the premarital period was on their feminine purity, which had to be closely guarded by its possessor and her hovering parents from male beasts of prey who waited to snatch it away. Her carefully protected modesty, delicacy, and refinement were said to be the very qualities that would make her desirable and lovable, justifying biblical restrictions of her rights.[\[footnote\]](#) A proscriptive guide to courtship behavior published in the *Baptist Standard* in 1894 was succinctly entitled, "Don't Girls." The "don'ts" ranged from flirting and answering anonymous letters to strolling the "highways and byways" and taking buggy-rides at night. "Suffering familiarities" like holding hands and being fondled led to "the pitfalls of moral death," and sipping wine rendered one helpless and devoid of "womanly sensibilities." Young women were urged not to "lay that innocent head on any bosom save that of the home."
BS, February 18, 1897, p. 3.

Cloistered and protected there, she was to remain completely passive:

"You should not so much as seek for an introduction to the stranger. . . .If you are deserving, you will be found, sought after and duly wedded. Don't be forward, presuming, bold, brazen. For your life, don't.[\[footnote\]](#)"
BS, December 27, 1894, p. 1.

Somehow behind the parlor curtains and under her doting parents' gaze, this shielded young woman was also recognized to be largely in control of her destiny. One of J. B. Gambrell's most famous essays described the feminine personality in its almost-grown state, "The Tee-Hee Girl"--a living kaleidoscope, different at every turn, but always picturesque." In terms of social skills and perception, she was steps ahead of any suitor who came to call; therefore, she could guide the direction of their relationship. With tricks as effective as a magician's she maneuvered the situation to bring about her desires:

"If from refined sensibility or for other reasons she does not wish to hear a declaration of love, which her fine intuition tells her is waiting a chance, she will see that the chance does not come. . . .If she is ready she can beat Gen. Lord Roberts clearing the coast."[\[footnote\]](#)"

BS, May 3, 1900, p. 1.

In another address Gambrell described a determined woman as having a "predestination look on her face" and suggested to young men that whenever they encountered that look, they agree with whatever the lady suggested because it was "the short cut out of a great many controversies, in which you will always be worsted."[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, April 8, 1897, p. 6.

A young woman exercised considerable control of her choice of a mate, and many older Baptists proffered advice on her making that judgment. She was not to be swept off her feet by superficialities like "toothpick shoes and fantastic monocles,"[\[footnote\]](#) but to look for a man of "good humor, intelligence, thrift, courage, industry and Christian character."[\[footnote\]](#) Submission would pose no problem if she chose someone to whom she was willing to be subject, they explained;[\[footnote\]](#) however, she should not expect any man to be perfect. "You are not perfect yourself. What would you do with a perfect man?" asked Galveston pastor A. W. Lamar in a 1893 sermon; then he concluded with an arresting figure of speech: "This world never saw but one perfect pair, and they slipped down the banks of Paradise together."[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, February 25, 1897, p. 4.

BS, March 2, 1893, p. 3.

BS, May 10, 1900, p. 7.

BS, March 2, 1893, p. 3.

Girls did feel a power over their own lives before marriage. Annie Jenkins Sallee, the missionary to China, wrote about refusing a proposal while still a schoolgirl at Baylor: "He said he didn't see how he could ever give ""me"" up. I laughed at him, and told him he didn't have me to give me up."

[\[footnote\]](#)

Sallee, Diary, entry dated January 27, 1898.

Generalization about marriage is always hazardous because the relationship is deeply affected by general cultural patterns. It has subjective, personal dimensions that can withstand or transcend societal norms. Hence, good marriages exist in the least conducive conditions, and the best of times produce some miserable matches. Throughout the period of this study, therefore, both good and bad marriages existed regardless of societal influences or the relative degree of equality and control the wife enjoyed. The national climate of opinion shifted between 1880 and 1920 and the role of Baptist women within marriage was somewhat altered, but that merely implies change in the institution rather than improvement. Judgment on the degree of improvement was probably correctly assessed by one Baptist social observer in 1904: "there is more good ""and"" bad than ever before."

[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, August 11, 1904, p. 2. (Italics mine.)

Precise evaluation of the satisfaction evoked by marriage remains elusive because that measurement would have to take into consideration the expectations of the married partners. In the late nineteenth century, a woman generally expected to encourage and provide comfort for her husband and anticipated that he would protect and support her. This symbiosis worked most satisfactorily as long as both were working toward a common goal (as typified in religious occupations and farm life) and the contributions of both were highly valued. A kind of comradeship based on mutual respect was possible under this system as long as the sexual stereotypes that defined the roles were unquestioned.

In an idealized paternalistic marriage, the wife viewed her husband as her leader, a beneficent protector who led only after he had won her affection and trust. As her friend and comrade, he tried to discern her desires as well as impose his own. She gave weight to the worth of her opinions by faithfully fulfilling her domestic and maternal tasks. Dictatorial leadership was actually submerged in a "mutual adaptation of mind, body, and heart." [\[footnote\]](#) "Paraphrasing the New Testament, one Baptist writer stated that if the husband loved his wife "first and always as well or better than [himself]," married life held the potential of being "the happiest earthly fruition of life." [\[footnote\]](#) This model depended on a high level of

performance by both sexes, a sense of fulfillment in carrying out one's own duties and gratification for the spouse's contribution.

BS, February 25, 1897, p. 4.

BS, February 2, 1887, n.p.

Usually such connubial bliss remained in the realm of the ideal—Baptist writers described their own marriages or those of others they knew as conforming to the pattern, but their descriptions were not specific enough to convince the skeptical. One that answered the need for specificity was J. B. Gambrell's recollection of his and his wife Mary's life in the period following the Civil War. Although Gambrell espoused male leadership in the home, their arrangement was more egalitarian than authoritarian. "How did we live?" he asked rhetorically. "The pastor" (a thinly veiled reference to himself) had a garden and a cow. The pastor's wife gave music lessons, did fancy sewing now and then, and kept boarders. Occasionally she sold milk, and in the summer she ran a school for boys. When money ran out, the pastor sold Bibles in the country.

One way or another they lived, and perhaps the two happiest people in that town were the pastor and his wife, who were fighting month by month a game fight to make ends meet and to do a good work, and were winning.

The preacher and his wife divided the housework. He rose first, made the fires, drew the water, put the kettle on. By that time the wife was dressed. He dressed the children and made the beds, by the time breakfast was ready. The beds never looked right, but it made no difference when every one was asleep. It was just as fine as could be. [\[footnote\]](#)

BS, January 7, 1915, p. 21.

The spiritual and intellectual companionship that characterized such a marriage was openly celebrated; the sexual dimension that was present was not forthrightly discussed. Baptists were adherents of a Protestant view of sexuality: promiscuity outside the marriage vows was strictly forbidden, sexual relations within marriage fulfilled both males' and females' desires for pleasure and intimacy, as well as reproduction. [\[footnote\]](#) Texas Baptist women did not leave accounts of their sex lives beyond the obvious presence of offspring. They were exposed to the physical aspects of farm life and domestic animals, but they were often naive about human sexual

behavior far into adolescence. They were definitely responsive to males and bore a sensuality capable of being aroused. Sexuality in marriage was never disparaged, as the following correspondence indicates. Although the writer had been inexperienced and had not even addressed her fiancé by his first name before their marriage, she later wrote him: "I want you and I love you so. . .My lover, never do I want to leave you again. . . .You are my pet and my darling and I want to be with you so much."[\[footnote\]](#)

George D. Kelsey, *Social Ethics Among Southern Baptists, 1917-1969* (Metuchen, N.J., The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1973), pp. 160-161.

Annie Jenkins Sallee to W. Eugene Sallee, March 30, March 23, April 5, 1929. Jenkins-Sallee Papers, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

The benevolent authority that was described in the Bible as personifying Christ's relation to the church as well as the husband's to the wife, therefore, was softened in its most idealistic state to a partnership, with the wife voluntarily submitting to the husband's judgment on controversial matters (the exception was her Christian faith which he had no right to dispute).

[\[footnote\]](#) The system allowed for reciprocity, but it rested on a basis of male privilege and a belief that power was finally man's right and subordination woman's duty. In many marriages—those that did not measure up to the beneficent model—the power that was the male's because he was by divine edict somehow closer to the godhead was reduced to power for its own sake. The husband's activities and ambitions were an end in themselves; the wife's contributions to the family were means to serve that end. Not valued by her partner, she often discounted her own worth and suffered from low self-esteem.

BS, August 10, 1916, p. 11.

Evidence that wives felt inferior to their husbands is most abundant for the 1880s and 1890s and gradually diminishes in the twentieth century.

Demonstration of that inferiority is given in comments that indicated women wanted more consideration, but were defensive about asking for it. "Some Advice to Husbands," given by a woman in 1887, used anti-feminist reasoning to encourage men to treat their wives with more kindness. The list included 1) thinking of her happiness ("she will reverence you next to God"), 2) indulging her whims ("comfort yourself with the reflection of

man's superiority"), and 3) being a companion to her (it will elevate her). [\[footnote\]](#) Another article on neglected wives did not suggest lessening women's tasks--cooking, taking care of the house and children, making clothes, milking cows, churning, keeping a garden, washing, and ironing--but urged men to appreciate women more for what they did. [\[footnote\]](#) A woman whose husband had refused her money for the church, claiming that she had overstepped her place (that of obedience to him), countered him with another scriptural directive: "He that provideth not for his own household has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel." She concluded on a pathetic note: "Give women a chance and then tell her [sic] of her faults kindly. [\[footnote\]](#)"

Texas Baptist and Herald (Dallas), May 4, 1887, n.p. Hereafter this newspaper will be referred to as *TBH*.

TBH, January 26, 1887, n.p.

TBH, March 23, 1887, n.p.

A swaggering kind of male superiority, certainly one that involved physical violence or brutality, was not condoned in marriage by Baptists, but even smug self-centeredness came under attack in the mid-1890s. J. B. Cranfill printed an article in the *Baptist Standard* in 1897 written anonymously "by a wife" who thought "the wife's cause should find a champion." "She felt that society had erroneously placed too much emphasis on the family's seeing that the husband/father was properly cared for. "What reasons have you husbands. . .for claiming the continuance of your wives' affections? What have you done, what are you doing, to merit it?" She wanted the same sympathy for her work, the same attention and affection from her husband that she was taught she owed him. [\[footnote\]](#)

BS, May 20, 1897, p. 10.

Male church leaders also voiced disappointment in men who carried their God-given rights to an extreme, especially when they used women's sacrifices for nothing but personal gain. The problems with marriage did not stem from women neglecting their role or pressing for more than they deserved, J. B. Gambrell wrote, but from men who had become solely "money makers." He expressed nothing but disdain for such men, completely absorbed in "the commercial spirit," in clubs and social demands that kept them away from home. Their habits were

"more like stray curs than respectable men. They prowled around all the public places of a city like dogs hunting for something to eat, and at late hours go back to what ought to be home simply to sleep. And these are the gentry who are competent to instruct women how to keep in their sphere.

[\[footnote\]](#)"

BS, February 28, 1895, p. 1.

In the face of men's failure, Gambrell thought women had a right to take over their responsibilities in the family, particularly the training of the children. But he deplored the loss of mutual concern for marriage, children, and the home. He affirmed the traditional order of man as head of the family, but man should hold the position not for privilege, but "for the good of his loved ones and for the order of society."[\[footnote\]](#)

Ibid.

Changes in the institution of marriage and the separation of males' and females' spheres of interest only increased in the new century. To counteract the negative effect they felt the decline of the home would have on religion and society at large and to grasp at a familiar source of comfort and stability, Baptists increased their teaching on God's plan for family living. Central to that model was the influential wife/mother who "made" the home and integrated its members' common life. Presiding as "queen" over "the foundation of morality, the chief educational institution and fostering place for religion. . . where the race is made and the future decided,"[\[footnote\]](#) a woman had more than a career, she had "a life." She sacrificed public acclaim and economic gain, but she was told she should feel satisfied with the knowledge that through her influence on her husband and her children, she shaped the world. She was the "little panting tugboat, with arms of steel and heart of fire, carrying the great steamer up against the tide."[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, March 30, 1916, p. 6.

BS, December 24, 1914, p. 6.

While maintaining the house and promoting the well-being of her husband were key elements of the model Christian woman's life, her greatest achievement was her role as mother. Stemming from a "natural" gift, she was expected to know how to appeal to children, to nurture and to teach them in ways that escaped men:

"There is a mother sense and only mothers have it. There is a woman sense and how long is it going to require for men to find out that women know a thing or two better than men can ever teach them? [\[footnote\]](#)"

BS, February 21, 1895, p. 1.

Within a patriarchal system, motherhood was woman's avenue to power. Man's life had an end-quality in religion, politics, and economics; in producing a child, however, he became the means and woman the end. The elevation of that element of her life, therefore, became the first and most natural way for a woman to demonstrate a growing sense of power and individuality. Residues of low esteem and injunctions regarding submission caused women to fail to identify their maternal role as aggressive—they claimed that all their ambition was for their child—but the child's success or failure was interpreted as the success or failure of the mother. The male child, particularly, often served as the channel of her aspirations; through him she achieved the fame and worth otherwise denied her. "She lives. . . in the lives of her two noble preacher boys" was a typical description of a mother's derivation of power from her children. [\[footnote\]](#)

BS, February 10, 1916, p. 9.

Mothers were urged to be authoritative and direct in guiding their children's lives; children were taught they should always take mother's advice. "Man is so constituted that he must be tied to something," "claimed a Y.M.C.A. speaker, and he nominated "mother's apron string" as earth's strongest tie to the surest authority. [\[footnote\]](#) She could be trusted for conveying the truth in matters moral and religious; she also supplied the support one needed to maintain allegiance to faith and duty. [\[footnote\]](#) Mother's tie with God bordered on the supernatural:

BS, August 26, 1897, p. 10.

BS, February 6, 1913, p. 15.

"Mother is next to our Savior. She is love, and love is holy. [\[footnote\]](#)"

BS, November 21, 1912, p. 31.

". . . bend once against beneath the tender hands of your mother, who will carry you and your other loved ones, and all your griefs and sorrows, with her to the throne of grace. [\[footnote\]](#)"

BS, August 26, 1897, p. 10.

"The gracious Savior knows that there have been times when I would have fallen in life's stern battle line, if it had not been for the precious mother-love that tucked me in when came the cold winter blasts in the long ago. My sweet mother never believed me bad, and her faith and confidence drew out the best and noblest that was in me. . . . Dear, sweet, precious mother, . . . thy pure, unselfish love, lavished so graciously upon thy unworthy boy, has served to bear him up when all other human strength seemed gone.

[\[footnote\]](#)"

BS, January 14, 1904, p. 4.

A dying mother's entreaty, "Son, meet me in heaven," was sure to make a lasting earthly impression on her grieving child. The frequency of death, in fact, bore upon the attachment of both child and mother to each other. Part of a mother's investment in her children stemmed from fear that they would be snatched away or was compensation for the ones she had lost. "Sister Hill" of Henderson was a pathetic example of the fortitude called for in that age of higher infant mortality. "A most worthy Christian lady left a widow while yet young," Mrs. Hill lost four children in a month's time from typhoid. "The dear sister has not murmured yet," someone reported, "but she says she wants Susie left to her."[\[footnote\]](#) Repeated reports of the death of young children and the unending pain associated with that experience explain, in part, the tenacious strength of the mother-child relationship.

TBH, February 2, 1887, n.p.

The impulse behind the reverence for mother and the nostalgia regarding childhood and home also stemmed from a desire to reinstate authority and simplicity in a complex, shifting world. Competition between the sexes and the assertiveness of women were part of a modernity that Baptists dreaded and built defenses against while, at the same time, embracing. On the part of the more thoughtful, however, the changes had implications more devastating than the loss of the image of Mother standing at the door of a country cottage. The destructive element they feared was a separation of the interests of the sexes or a "war between the sexes." "Different spheres of operation (male, economic; female, domestic) were gradually accepted during the 1880-1920 period, when many Texans moved from a rural to an urban setting. But at some level, they asserted, the interests of the sexes

must coincide--specifically, in their offspring--or civilization was endangered. "The world can still go on while nations war against nations," a minister warned, "'but when in every house there is war declared between man and woman there comes the end, with the race wiped out and the devil in possession of the planet.'" [\[footnote\]](#) Another insisted that the sexes must finally have a basis of respect for one another; cynicism about the opposite sex would end in "hatred for the whole race and the God who made them." [\[footnote\]](#)

BS, May 23, 1895, p. 5.

BS, March 2, 1893, p. 3.

Baptist women's liberation did not reach the point of denying an organic connection with men or disclaiming the satisfaction derived from having children. They modified the paternalistic model of marriage by making their influence felt and by claiming the role of a partner. In the final analysis, however, they accepted male authority, but they did so more on a voluntary basis than from fear and awe. Their ideological and emotional bias in favor of order and tradition kept them committed to monogamous marriage, the most advantageous arrangement they could conceive for channeling sexual attraction along a civilized course. Divorce remained infrequent and was acceptable only on the basis of the unfaithfulness of one of the partners, with equal disfavor shown toward either the man or woman who broke the marriage vow.

Motherhood remained a strong ideal through the end of the period, and women remained basically committed to nurturing and teaching children. There was a growing acceptance of a woman's remaining childless and unmarried, but the majority still took delight in rearing children and those children praised the influence of their mothers. Their passive-aggressive model of mothering often developed into the currently unfashionable excesses of "martyrdom" and involvement in adult children's lives, but a strong commitment to authority—to respect for self-denial and for one's elders—cast those parental admonitions in a different light. "Mother's apron strings" were seen as a lifeline rather than a noose.

Most women differentiated between their organic connection to their husband and children and their arbitrary consignment to household

drudgery and isolation. They felt increasing freedom to simplify household tasks so they could take on wider religious, educational, and civic responsibilities (and, no doubt, to experience more leisure). Although sacrifice for one's children was still a commendable act, "self-sacrificing traditions" of domestic life were expendable. Movement to urban areas decreased the amount of time women spent gardening and keeping livestock, giving them greater mobility; those who could afford it simplified their routines even further with electricity and labor-saving devices. Some cautioned that women needed discipline and confinement to remain properly religious, but most gladly reduced their household servitude. These emancipated daughters' struggle with "the dear old crones" who thought they should still be curing hams and knitting socks was illustrated in a delightful allegory related by Waco pastor J. M. Dawson:

Such women [dear old crones] are in truth like a good old mother duck, who, having for years led her ducklings to the same pond, when that pond has been drained and nothing is left but baked mud, will still persist in bringing her younglings down to it, and walk about with anxious quack trying to induce them to enter it. But the ducklings, with fresh young instincts, hear far-off the delicious drippings of the new dam which has been built higher up to catch the water, and they smell the chick weed and the long grass that is growing beside it and absolutely refuse to disport themselves on baked mud and to pretend to seek for worms where no worms are. And they leave the ancient mother quacking beside her pond and set out to seek for new pastures—perhaps to lose themselves on the way; perhaps to find it. To the old mother one is inclined to say: "Ah, good old mother duck, can you not see the world has changed? You cannot bring the water back into the dried up pond. Mayhap it was better and pleasanter when it was there, but it is gone forever and would you and yours swim again, it must be in other waters." New machinery, new duties.[\[footnote\]](#)
BS, June 19, 1913, p. 3.

Civic Duty

Civic duty. Since the Southern Baptist Convention was formed in response to the issue of slavery and other sectional conflicts that had definite political ramifications, its members have been involved from its beginnings in political maneuvering. As Baptists, however, they have prided themselves on their allegiance to the principle of the separation of church and state, so they have distinguished between the entanglement of the church and the participation of individual Christians in civil affairs. Baptists were not expected to shun politics entirely in favor of spiritual matters, but to bring Christian standards to bear on the affairs of the state by voting and expressing their views. In keeping with their theological emphases on progress through the regeneration of the individual and on the realization of ultimate goals in a supernatural realm, they were most involved in political causes that related to morality rather than to economics or foreign policy. And to keep the church—the local congregation—and government separated, Baptists usually voiced their concerns through extra-church bodies ("conventions" and "associations"), denominational newspapers, and non-ecclesiastical organizations rather than through sermons or local church activities.

In Texas, Baptist men were encouraged to vote and Baptist newspapers reported on elections and candidates throughout this study's span. Except for the prohibition cause, however, Texas Baptist women demonstrated virtually no political interest or involvement until the United States had entered World War I. Their concerns were centered in family and church life, with the exception of their interest in mission work, and that focused on the same elements in a foreign setting. Women's speeches, articles, and letters made minimal reference to politics or current events at home or abroad. From long tradition, the realm of politics was a "man's world." As long as women's interests were being served by the men in their family casting votes, running for office, and keeping abreast of political affairs, they remained apolitical or involved only in the background.

The primary issue that stimulated Baptists' participation in social and political action was the prohibition of the manufacture, sale, and consumption of intoxicating beverages. Even though they had moved from

merely a temperate stance toward alcohol to the advocacy of abstention by the 1880s,[\[footnote\]](#) they were late joining the national movement because of its association with causes unfavorable in the South--specifically, abolition and women's rights. By the late nineteenth century, however, several Texas Baptists got involved in the thick of the fray. J. B. Cranfill, editor of the Baptist Standard, was active in the Prohibition Party and became its vice-presidential candidate in 1892 when he was only thirty-three. He remained a leading spokesman for that party's restricting itself to the single issue of prohibition instead of loading its platform with other "isms" before the Anti-Saloon League took over the cause and pursued that strategy.[\[footnote\]](#) Cranfill, of course, had an excellent forum in his paper for keeping the temperance issue foremost in Texas Baptists' minds even though he never convinced many of them to forsake the Democratic Party. J. B. Gambrell was another popular leader associated with the cause—his son Rhoderic was killed in Mississippi in a struggle with saloon forces, "the first victim in our fair southland to the cause of prohibition"[\[footnote\]](#)—and Gambrell kept up the fight.

Rufus B. Spain, At Ease in Zion: Social History of Southern Baptists, 1865-1900 (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967), p. 179.

Jack S. Blocker, Jr., Retreat from Reform: The Prohibition Movement in the United States, 1890-1913 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976), p. 110. See also pp. 19-25 for Blocker's discussion of Cranfill as typifying the prohibitionists' attempt to bring morality to bear on the social order.

BS, November 29, 1894, p. 1.

Probably through the urging of men like these, Texas Baptist women's state mission organization usually had a talk on temperance at its meetings in the late 1880s[\[footnote\]](#) and made a committee on temperance one of its standing appointments in the 1890s. The resolutions drafted by these committees usually contained vivid descriptions of the "deadly curse of drink" and urged women to maintain attractive, alcohol-free homes so their men-folk would not seek pleasure elsewhere, to convince those males "winsomely and wisely" of the righteousness of the cause, and to work for the salvation of drunkards and the comfort of their families.[\[footnote\]](#) It was assumed women would exercise temperance themselves, but they were still responsible for their sons', husbands', and brothers' actions: "In many a home the punch bowl and the wine have caused the steps of bright and

hopeful boys to first take hold on hell""[\[footnote\]](#)"A great responsibility rests upon our women concerning the temperance question" warned a 1902 Baptist editorial, yet those women were armed only with the indirect tool of persuasion and were limited to action in the sphere of their homes.

[\[footnote\]](#)

Annual Report of the Baptist Women Mission Workers of Texas, 1887, p. 76.

Proceedings of the Baptist Women Mission Workers of Texas, 1899, p. 152; 1905, p. 174.

Ibid., 1899, p. 152.

BS, June 5, 1902, p. 4.

Despite the importance and urgency of the cause, many men regretted that women were having to take up the temperance fight: that in many places the battle depended on women on all fronts, not just in the home. One insisted that the burden of moral reform should fall on men, but "if men go on failing in their sphere. . .women will have to rescue [the government] as Deborah did in Israel."[\[footnote\]](#) The women were not that explicit or forward in actually requesting the franchise for themselves, but they did gain political acumen and by 1911 endorsed the Anti-Saloon League and the Women's Christian Temperance Union and called for a boycott of publications with liquor advertisements.[\[footnote\]](#) After Texas granted women the right to vote in primaries in 1918, their temperance report simply noted: "Last summer the chairman of this report was glad to cast her first ballot, and this Convention may be sure that she blacked the name of every whiskey politician on the list."[\[footnote\]](#)"

BS, March 14, 1895, p. 1.

Proceedings of the Baptist Women Mission Workers of Texas, 1911, p. 211.

Proceedings of the Baptist Women Mission Workers of Texas, 1918, p. 53.

Limited evidence suggests that not many Texas Baptist women were active in W.C.T.U. or other politically oriented organizations during this period even though they ultimately voiced sympathy with them.[\[footnote\]](#) Baptists were extremely hesitant about "unionism," or ecumenical movements, and these women were just perfecting their own missions organization, lagging behind other Protestant women. Not only were they not used to cooperating with women from other denominations, they were reticent about asserting

themselves on behalf of W.C.T.U.'s overtly political goals. Contrasting with this denial of overt power was J. B. Cranfill's frequent exoneration in the Baptist Standard of Carrie Nation's tactics. "Of course, there is a great outcry against her methods," he admitted, "but The Standard again bids her God-speed. We rejoice at every dive she smashes, and hope that her self-sacrificing crusade will make the beginning of the end of the saloon curse." [\[footnote\]](#) Mrs. Nation wrote the Standard acknowledging, "'Tis so sweet to fight a good fight!" [\[footnote\]](#)

"Women's pages" in the newspapers make very little mention of W.C.T.U. or "White Ribbon Ladies" or of any personalities associated with the organization. They would likely have featured reprints of papers given at W.C.T.U. meetings if such had existed. Some Baptist women were actively engaged after 1920 in the organization and worked to keep the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment from passing. See Inez B. Hunt, Century One: A Pilgrimage of Faith (Dallas: Woman's Missionary Union, 1979), p. 41. *BS*, January 31, 1901, p. 5.

BS, February 20, 1902, p. 12. This letter, in which Mrs. Nation also defended her fondness for debate--against Mormons and spiritualists, as well as liquor advocates--was signed, "Carrie A. Nation, Your Loving Home Defender."

Even working to eliminate what they considered to be the "deadliest vice that ever cursed the lives of men" [\[footnote\]](#) did not give Baptist women justification for politicization or seeking to exercise direct, individual power in voting, much less smashing barrooms in a physical fight. They waited for men to voice women's need for power and finally accepted the public struggle only to fill a gap in legislating morality they felt men were neglecting. "When you encourage [a woman] to become a politician, you have inflicted a serious wrong on her," it was explained; "if her husband is of any account, he ought to represent her in the outside contact with the world." [\[footnote\]](#) One Woodville woman "had solved the suffrage problem in the best possible way by rearing six sons who will vote for the Prohibition candidate." [\[footnote\]](#)

BS, April 8, 1897, p. 4.

BS, January 16, 1913, p. 12.

BS, September 18, 1902, p. 5.

During the second decade of the twentieth century Texas Baptists admitted that men no longer adequately represented the family unit. Many families had abandoned their isolated, common life on farms for the separation of responsibilities and interests that accompanied urban living. "Social conditions," a Baptist Standard reprint from The Atlantic noted, "have divided the labor of the world between the sexes, and the work of men is almost entirely concerned with the production and distribution of things, the work of women almost entirely with the production and sustenance of persons." "[footnote] This reasoning formed a basis in the minds of some for granting women suffrage, recognizing that they "had an interest in many questions which men do not understand and would not properly consider and act upon." Responsibility rested on women to set forward those matters, specifically the ones dealing with morals and with the protection of women and children. [footnote]

BS, March 14, 1918, p. 17, quoting The Atlantic, March, 1916.

BS, October 15, 1914, p. 3.

Spokesmen against women's suffrage continued to make their traditional protest, insisting that the home was woman's sphere and that she would reduce her dignity and refinement by associating with the political world, but key Baptists foresaw the inevitability of change. "President Brooks of Baylor has set the girls to studying civic questions in view of the certain coming of female suffrage," reported J. B. Gambrell in a 1912 editorial entitled "Why Female Suffrage is Coming." He assumed that Baptist women would adequately meet the challenge because they were schooled in a democratic church government in which they had always taken their place "to pray, pay, vote and do the ordinary acts of a responsible human being." "The old life"

"of seclusion is no longer possible for women," he claimed,

no matter what they might wish nor men fear. And following these changes the dearest interests of women are vitally affected by legislation more and more; interests that concern home, bread, rights in children, in property, and even virtue itself. All these things are in the hands of legislators, elected by men alone and many of the men interested in things detrimental to women. But beyond these things there is another factor of tremendous potency

making for the rights of women. This is the day of democracy. The bonds that have bound the race to kingcraft and hierarchal programs have to an unprecedented degree been cast off. Whoever now, in pants or petticoats, claims special prerogatives for a class must show cause. . . .

Many are moved forward by this spirit without knowing its source. I am not making a plea for female suffrage. I am telling why it is coming. To oppose it will prove futile.[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, December 19, 1912, p. 1.

Samuel P. Brooks, president of Baylor University, was even a less defensive and more positive advocate of woman suffrage. In a speech to the Waco Equal Suffrage Association in 1914, he gave a thoughtful explanation of the transformation of social power from a base of physical strength to one of merit and intelligence, for which women were as well suited as men. He claimed that men had kept women repressed because they were just as surely victims of cultural conditioning as women were. He believed that women were weary of acting indirectly, exercising "silent powers," and demonstrating "canned innocence." "Real mothers, like real fathers, are of the earth--earthy," he revealed. Hope lay in both sexes realistically seeking common ground and growth. [\[footnote\]](#)

Samuel P. Brooks, "Some Phases of Woman Suffrage," TS of speech delivered April 30, 1914, to the Waco Equal Suffrage Association, Waco, Texas. Samuel P. Brooks Papers, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Unaccustomed or unwilling to deal with political issues in or out of the church, women generally let these men defend the suffrage cause and waited for the vote to come their way. The exception was Edna Best Crawford, a short-story contributor to the Standard, who wrote:

When Dr. Gambrell's most magnificent editorial on "Why Female Suffrage is Coming" appeared, my hand sought his across the miles of distance intervening between us in a fervent "God bless you, Dr. Gambrell!" "and in a thousand amens!" I believe the time is fitting when we as women should break our silence, however reluctantly, and boldly declare our positions.

In response to the time-worn excuse that voting would detract from woman's role as wife and mother, she responded: "Doctors, lawyers, merchants, farmers nor any of the great host of other professions do not give up their professions nor neglect them because of casting a ballot."

[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, February 13, 1913, p. 7.

The women did not join in Edna Crawford's chorus of "amens," but were either timid and awkward about facing the subject in open forum, disinterested and preoccupied with other concerns, or willing to wait for the inevitable.[\[footnote\]](#) "There is no use to jump into the sea to pull a ship in, when it is already coming," explained Dr. Gambrell, justifying his own moderation toward an issue that he supported in principle.[\[footnote\]](#) As predicted, Texas women were granted suffrage to vote in primaries, almost tantamount to enfranchisement in the one-party state, in 1918; Texas was the ninth state in the Union and first in the South to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment in June 1919.[\[footnote\]](#)

Baptist women exhibited the same patient posture toward the Southern Baptist Convention, which was debating the issue of women's serving as voting delegates, or "messengers," during this same period. They finally received a positive vote in 1918.

BS, July 13, 1916, p. 10.

A. Elizabeth Taylor, "The Woman Suffrage Movement in Texas," Journal of Southern History, 17, No. 2 (1951), pp. 210, 215.

Southern Baptists prided themselves on remaining true to primitive Christianity's emphasis on preaching the gospel instead of turning aside to social reform; nevertheless, they demonstrated a growing degree of social consciousness in the late nineteenth century. Beside the temperance campaign, Texas Baptists voiced their support of anti-gambling crusades, "blue laws" (laws regulating commerce and amusement on Sundays), anti-lynching laws, and the care of orphans and the aged.[\[footnote\]](#) In the early twentieth century they began two substantial hospitals and increased their commitment to orphanages and relief for aged ministers. They spoke out against the improper use of woman and child labor,[\[footnote\]](#) against lenient divorce laws and the unequal treatment of men and women in divorce,[\[footnote\]](#) and in favor of equal pay for equal work.[\[footnote\]](#)

Historian John Lee Eighmy pointed out, however, that Southern Baptists expressed more interest in social legislation than they manifested in developing or influencing concrete programs.[\[footnote\]](#) Their interests in the civil and social realm continued to correspond with the individualistic and moralistic strains of their theology. Baptist women usually restricted themselves to general moralizing rather than commenting on specific legislation or reform.

Spain, p. 211.

Kenneth K. Bailey, Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964), p. 41.

BS, January 5, 1905, p. 5; BS, May 21, 1903, p. 3.

BS, March 14, 1918, p. 11.

John Lee Eighmy, Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972), pp. 110-111.

World War I generated a surge of patriotism from Texas Baptists; they saw its goals as consistent with their efforts to impose moral order on the institutions of this world. They felt that when the world had been made "safe for democracy," it would be better prepared to accept Baptist principles of democracy in church government, as well.[\[footnote\]](#) They rallied to capitalize on opportunities to work with the chaplaincy program and evangelize in army bases, despite their chafing at the "regulations and restrictions" that official process entailed.[\[footnote\]](#) Women maintained their record of broad identification and little political comment (e.g., they sympathized with the "war mothers" of the world), but they rolled bandages and cooperated with organizations like the Red Cross, Y.M.C.A., and Y.W.C.A. in an unprecedented fashion.[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, January 31, 1918, p. 18.

BS, August 9, 1917, p. 1.

BS, May 23, 1918, p. 23.

The end of the war left Baptists in a bouyant mood--they felt that it was going to be possible to channel the ferment and changes of the pre-war years in a progressive direction. They hoped that superior education would enlighten and fill the increased freedom that both sexes were experiencing. They planned to utilize new wealth and mobility to evangelize more widely

and effectively. The enactment of prohibition reform and the triumph of democracy held, for them, the promise that more than any other time in history, the world was ripe for their message. Armed with education and the vote, women had joined the active ranks of denominational soldiers—not as generals, but several as captains and lieutenants and a multitude of foot soldiers. A few Baptists still pled nostalgically for the virtues of the simple past and some prophetically described the secular materialism of the future, but for a "brief, shining moment" they harmonized change and vision in a synthesis that they foresaw would bring about "a reconstruction of the modern world on Christian principles."[\[footnote\]](#)

BS, February 21, 1918, p. 6.

Appropriately, the Southern Baptist Convention met in Washington, D.C., in 1920, and George Truett, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, preached a historic sermon on the steps of the Capitol. "Like Pericles summoning the Athenians to recall the source of their greatness,"[\[footnote\]](#) Truett set forth Baptists' highest aspiration for an individual's response to duty, both civic and religious:

James Ralph Scales, "Religious Liberty and Public Policy," in Baptists and the American Experience, ed. James E. Wood, Jr. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1976), p. 187.

Baptists have one consistent record concerning liberty throughout all their long and eventful history. They have never been a party to oppression of conscience. They have forever been the unwavering champions of liberty, both religious and civil. Their contention now is, and has been, and, please God, must ever be, that it is the natural and fundamental and infeasible right of every human being to worship God or not, according to the dictates of his conscience, and, as long as he does not infringe upon the rights of others, he is to be held accountable alone to God for all religious beliefs and practices. Our contention is not for mere toleration, but for absolute liberty. . . . God wants free worshippers and no other kind.[\[footnote\]](#)

George W. Truett, "Baptist and Religious Liberty," in God's Call to America (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1923), pp. 32-33.

For the majority of Baptists—Baptist women—many of the implications of that liberty were just beginning to dawn.

Conclusion

CHAPTER VI CONCLUSION

There was the great romance of all America—the woman in the sun-bonnet. . . . Who has written her story? Who has painted her picture? No one! One might suppose that she would occupy a central place in the drama of the planting of religion in the west, but even here the records are largely silent as to the part she played. Her influence was like the wind which "bloweth where it listeth"; we hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth, but we are conscious that it is all pervading.

[\[footnote\]](#)

William Warren Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1776-1840 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 131.

This study of Texas Baptist women was undertaken with the conviction that the story of American women's role in religion had been neglected, but was important and needed to be told in well-researched increments. Particularly was this true of women in conservative religious groups. If, as I have contended, evangelical Christians have been ignored or cast in a derogatory light by scholars in the past century, the women among them have been, to an even greater extent, hidden or victimized by facile generalizations.

Texas Baptists represent but one facet of the conservative Christian mainstream, but, as a group that grew with a populous southwestern state, they offer important insights into American religious identity and development. Although Baptist women are key pieces of the "puzzle" that will ultimately reveal American women's influence in religion, that puzzle's completion yet depends on studies that should be undertaken regarding other mainline churches, sects that denied the culture, denominations in which women never organized, movements that offered women prominent or unusual roles, and the religious expression of various ethnic groups.

The church's influence on women cuts in two directions—it both fostered and resisted innovations in women's roles. In the Baptist tradition, democratic church government and individualistic theology provided avenues for women to act independently, yet the denomination's belief in male dominance in the family and the ministry kept women from exercising

all the privileges that men were offered. Like other Christian primitivists who have claimed that their interpretation of the scripture forms the core of God's will, Baptists believed that constraints were derived from a literal reading of the Bible. But, as with the other groups, they were actually selective in their use of that document.[\[footnote\]](#)

While a claim could be made for inconsistency in this use of scripture, the point can also be made that the Bible has remained authoritative across cultures and times because it displays numerous aspects of a concept or condition, offering this flexibility of interpretation.

Between 1880 and 1920 the selectivity of Texas Baptist women with regard to the scriptures involved changing their emphasis from those portions that restricted women to those that supported women's freedom. Although lagging behind, this change duplicated the direction of movement in the general culture. Southern Baptist historian Leon McBeth agrees that

Southern Baptists have basically followed their host culture in their teachings and attitudes about women. There is no convincing evidence that Southern Baptists have ever influenced their culture, or been in advance of the culture, on the question of women's rights. Every significant step in the emerging role of Southern Baptist women was preceded by comparable developments in society.[\[footnote\]](#)

Harry Leon McBeth, "The Role of Women in Southern Baptist History," Baptist History and Heritage, XII, 1 (January, 1977), p. 25.

He goes further to predict that as society grants additional rights to women, Baptists will do the same.[\[footnote\]](#)
Ibid.

Should we conclude, therefore, that biblical ideology did not influence the changes that affected the women who subscribed to it? It does appear that proof texts became less influential during this period; increasingly actions were rationalized on a pragmatic or economic basis. Still, however, Baptist women's belief system shaped the speed with which they accepted certain alterations in role, and it remained important for them to continue to feel that their actions were supported by the teachings of the Bible. Martin Marty, in A Nation of Behavers, recognizes the importance of doctrinal orthodoxy in providing for its numerous adherents a means of establishing

identity and stability in the face of the complexity of the culture. Evangelicals like Baptists, he affirms, are successful because they are both idealistic and worldly.[\[footnote\]](#) They define themselves in opposition to the culture while they partake of it economically and politically. Martin E. Marty, A Nation of Behavers (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 104-105.

The parts of the Bible that remained most authoritative and formed guidelines for behavior for Baptist women were the portions that assigned men the headship of the family and the church, thereby implying an inferior status for women. These two arenas of male privilege—the domestic and the religious—have been among the last to be altered by the liberation of women. Not until the 1960s, with the second wave of feminist activism, have they begun to move toward real parity. On these two fronts, biblical literalists are being dragged slowly by the culture toward sexual equality. They still have an anchor firmly implanted in the biblical tradition of sexual hierarchy—as has our national subconscious.

The Southern Baptist denomination in Texas, as well as its women, moved obviously in the direction of the general culture during the decades around 1900. These shifts carried them away from their tradition of atomized individualism toward conforming with the majority and with the culture at large. The changes were exemplified in the denominational establishment of centralized state bureaucracies and a southern-wide power structure that enlisted members and congregations to support corporate goals and projects. Every age group of the denomination was organized for mission causes, and programs in all aspects of church life were standardized.

Women's insistence on participating in this organizing fervor gave rise to their developing new skills and power. Across the South they developed an effective "union" that underwrote the Southern Baptist missionary enterprise. They became so skilled at generating collections and statistics, in fact, that efficiency and programs become ends in themselves and they were prone to neglect intellectual or theological content in favor of procedural or numerical goals. In part they avoided "weightier matters" as a result of the unspoken compromise they accepted in order to obtain the blessing of the male leadership of the denomination and legitimate their

organization. That compromise entailed their maintaining an auxiliary position—essentially, staying away from political and doctrinal controversy. While this agreement might have originally allowed Baptist women the right to their own organization, it definitely circumscribed their power.

The same configuration of change was noted in other religious activities of women. Within the local church they expanded their sphere, always leaving an exclusive province for men at the upper end of the spectrum of power—a holy of holies—in order to conform to a legalistic formula of male superiority. In local congregations, the male prerogatives were ordination to the ministry and to the diaconate and control of the managerial and monetary affairs of the church. Conforming to the same pattern used by the women's missionary organization to relate to the denomination as a whole, women in the local churches took an assisting role and did not deal directly with power or theological content. This does not mean that they did not exercise power, but that they used informal, indirect means of influence traditionally associated with females. As an operational mode, it was effective only as long as state Baptist life was limited to an intimate circle of friends and relatives.

As Mary Daly has pointed out, Christian women find it easier to plead directly for the liberation of others than for their own freedom of expression.[\[footnote\]](#) For Texas Baptist women, the motive that justified greatest assertiveness was mission work. While Texas itself was still "mission territory," some women caught a glimpse of wider usefulness and influence and began volunteering for foreign service. Both those who accepted the challenge and went abroad and those who stayed at home and supported them expanded their roles in unprecedented fashion. For the first time, Protestant women were offered the possibility of a religious vocation by serving as missionaries. Women's missionary efforts—women reaching out to women all over the world—was an "intensely personal, emotionally charged" activity, one that warrants wider scholarly exploration.[\[footnote\]](#) The unleashing of this creative force, one of the largest feminine movements in America, had a profound effect on religious women in this country and on women's status around the world.

Mary Daly, The Church and the Second Sex (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1968; rev. ed., 1975), p. 29.

Irwin T. Hyatt, Jr., Our Ordered Lives Confess (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 66.

Lower- and middle-class women—those comprising Texas Baptist churches during the period of this study—did not conform to the sheltered, Victorian model that was upheld as the paragon of feminine virtue at the time. They valued that ideal and looked at it with romantic longing, but without the economic and cultural background of either the Northeast or the Deep South, Texas simply did not provide circumstances in which that kind of existence could be realized. Life in the frontier state was informal, and women were more physically active and their rural pursuits still integrated with those of males. This activity and interaction generally gave women confidence and enabled them to feel less defensive toward men; it did not result, however, in their attempting to eliminate the differences between the sexes or aspiring to be manly. Instead, they adopted the attitude that feminine differences should not be sacrificed for equality's sake, but recognized and valued. Even when the movement from rural to urban arrangements of living separated the spheres of the sexes, giving women a more exclusively domestic and familial role, they did not view that identity as one inherently uncreative and unworthy, but undervalued. They claimed that their emphasis on self-denying characteristics and nurturing activities were closer to the Christian model than the production-oriented, materialistic aspirations of many males. They did not seek to change their identity or lower their moral standards, but demanded that men rise to their level.

Operating in the egalitarian atmosphere of the West and within the democratic tradition of the Baptist church, Texas Baptists demonstrated as interest in women's education early in the state's history, providing for coeducation from Baylor's founding in 1846. During the period of this study, they developed even greater recognition of women's intellectual powers and provided additional opportunities for the exercise of those powers. Women were given broader intellectual challenges, including the opportunity to become scholars, and were offered the possibility of affiliating with the Baptist seminary, but they did not enter as the equals of male candidates, particularly in biblical and doctrinal studies. Their

religious education was centered more on practical Christianity, the education of children, and moral elevation.

Career opportunities for females continued to be limited, but the acceptability of a woman having a career lost some of its stigma after the depression of the 1890s and with the shift in population to urban areas. Those choices, however, were generally limited to teaching, secretarial duties, or the arts. Texas Baptists remained consistently inflexible about women combining careers with marriage. Motherhood remained a woman's highest calling. If, by reason of childlessness and/or wealth, a married woman had leisure time, she generally gave herself to good works, the missionary society, or other women's club activities, which increased in popularity during the early part of the twentieth century.

Females' reputation for upholding morality and bringing the practical influences of Christianity to bear on society were keys in the development of Baptist women's attitude toward their civic duty. During this period their primary involvement in influencing society at large (apart from their attempts to evangelize it) was working on behalf of the temperance cause. As in their efforts to influence matters within the church, they tried initially to work informally, through males. Only when that method proved insufficient or ineffective were they willing to speak out and to vote. They did not demonstrate an interest in politics for its own sake and continued to be wary of exercising direct power, feeling more comfortable with informal, indirect means of influence in both religious and secular political contexts.

Women who lived in Texas between 1880 and 1920 felt they were living through a period of change. The transformation was expansive for them, transporting them from the isolated confinement of rural life and its preoccupation with physical toil into a wider world of experience and influence in both the church and society. As conservatives, accustomed to operating within the boundaries of authoritarian guidelines, they reacted to that charge with caution, always aware of the tension between freedom and authority. Their affinity for authority was not the product of intellectual timidity, but of an isolated lifestyle and a restricted world view. If that isolation and restriction have been dominant features of childhood, as they were with most Texas Baptists, they become adult habits—ways of

perceiving reality and bases for making decisions. Whether a woman's allegiance to biblical authority was based on this kind of psychological need or was the result of an intellectual decision, she justified changes in her life under the rubric of that system. She did not abandon belief in the Bible when its pattern no longer fit her experiences, but, at least initially, altered her conception of its teachings. Some, but certainly not all, who made this transition followed it with other steps that carried them outside the belief structure, but first, they needed to justify their freedom within the system that had provided meaning and authority.

Feminist philosopher Mary Daly exemplifies this process, although her journey began in another authoritarian segment of the Christian church, Roman Catholicism. Her first book, *The Church and the Second Sex*, called for a removal of the patriarchal emphasis of the Christian message.

[\[footnote\]](#) In her second book, *Beyond God the Father*, she moved outside the sphere of Christianity, explaining that no re-interpretation could eliminate the centrality of males and the marginality of females within that belief structure. [\[footnote\]](#)

Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*.

Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (New York: Beacon Press, 1973).

Nancy Cott, in *The Bonds of Womanhood*, her study of New England women, has a suggestive footnote in which she labels a similar response "de-conversion." Her definition is "an ideological disengagement from the convincing power of evangelical Protestantism (or the inability to accept the whole of it)." [\[footnote\]](#) The term aptly suggests that one does not move beyond the boundaries of an authoritative order without a radical reinterpretation of its power over one's life. This does not imply that women who become more liberated within the Christian system will inevitably leave it, but it does acknowledge the profound impact that system has on one's world view.

Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 204-205. The process of "de-conversion" is applicable beyond her direct reference to evangelical Protestantism. The problem of extrication from the tenacious grasp of other authoritarian ideological systems would be similar.

Another reaction consistent with conservatism (one that can enhance the critical perspective conservatives express within a society) was Texas Baptist women's acceptance of change in small increments. When this critical perspective is most viable, deliberate movements allow time for thoughtfulness regarding complex issues—in this case, sexual definition. Particularly is this valuable when the social order is threatened and good alternatives to change are not evident. During the period of this study, women expanded their role, but they would not agree to the removal of certain barriers or distinctions between the sexes. They were not willing to throw either the baby or its father out with the bathwater. This kind of cautiousness served a positive function by preserving their sense of worth and identity; they refused to deny who they were or what their past had been. They refused to denounce either men or maternity. But Baptist women's reluctance to change was not commendable insofar as it was a result of Baptist men's unwillingness to share their power or of women's perception that they were not worthy of wider consideration. Nor would it be commendable today if Southern Baptists react to change in women's role so slowly that they lose generations of able women.

In retaining their allegiance to family ties, Texas Baptist women expressed a criticism of women's liberation that was prophetic—later waves of popular and scholarly works on the subject explore the ways women can accommodate their needs for familial relationships and freedom at the same time. In a controversial article written for Daedalus in 1977, sociologist Alice Rossi, building on the work of sociobiologists, contended that developments in work patterns and expansion of women's role would have to accommodate fundamental relationships to children and family.[\[footnote\]](#) In 1980 historian Carl Degler defined "woman's dilemma" as one of harmonizing her needs for both family and meaningful work.[\[footnote\]](#) The answer to the problem, he feels, lies within the accommodation of two partners in marriage, not in the abandonment of the family as the central institution of our society. Betty Friedan's second manifesto of the women's liberation movement, The Second Stage, affirms, as did Baptist women, that the interests of the sexes are intertwined.[\[footnote\]](#) Without good alternatives to traditional family life and without the cooperation of men, women's liberation has thus far freed women to take on a job outside the home without relinquishing the job they already held within the home.

Under the present arrangement, the interests of children, as well as those of women, are being subordinated to a pattern of existence that is often inconsistent with either personal or familial needs.

Alice Rossi, "A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting," Daedalus 106, no. 2 (Spring, 1977), pp. 1-31.

Carl Degler, At Odds (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 436-473.

Betty Friedan, The Second Stage (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981).

If emphasis on interdependence of the sexes and the protection of children in a stable structure was the virtue of conservative reaction to changes in women's role, its fault was a failure to face the issue of power. These women were not powerless—women have always exercised power, they have just not done so directly. A power relationship always works two ways: the weak, by their consent, are as involved in its exercise as are the strong. Women have always had access to power through their sexuality, but the subjects of this study gained another source of denominational influence when they started generating large amounts of income to support mission causes. They, however, did not capitalize upon that advantage, but subordinated it to their evangelistic ideal. Men, therefore, maintained the reins of power in the denomination and continued to hold the corner on privilege, even though their exclusive rights diminished.

The majority of Baptist men were quite willing to retain their privilege—to be convinced that the sexes' separate spheres were somehow equal or that the New Testament's testimony to the lack of distinctions in Christ's kingdom was referring to an ideal that would only be recognized in the supernatural realm. Church polity never indicated that they believed such egalitarianism was intended for this world. But male chauvinism was not the only resistance Baptist women had to face in exercising full rights and personhood; their ambivalence about power demonstrates that in a deep but fundamental way women, too, were convinced of their inferiority. This was demonstrated in their reluctance to deal straightforwardly with complex issues and to engage in the inevitable conflict the struggle for power entails. Even when they gained experience and skills that equipped them for leadership positions, they chose, as well as accepted, to remain in a

restricted position and to exercise their influence subtly and vicariously. It was better not to aspire than to fail.

In the intervening years since 1920, Baptist women have maintained their intellectual, managerial, and spiritual gifts, but the denomination has been slow to include them on executive boards and committees and even more reluctant to ordain them. In the 1970s, however, economic necessity and social ferment has been exposing a new generation of young women to even greater tasks and possibilities, and they recognize that the notion that women are basically inferior, weak, and incompetent has a hollow ring. Increasing numbers of them are challenging male leadership in the two areas that remained male provinces in 1920—ordination and headship of the family. At least fifty-eight women had been ordained to the ministry by 1979,[\[footnote\]](#) and the issue of the ordination of women to the diaconate is surfacing in numerous congregations. Some young women are calling for a re-evaluation of the whole concept of privilege as exemplified by ordination in a denomination that embraces the "priesthood of all believers." Others are interpreting "calls" from God to fill the same range of ministries in which men participate. One female seminary student told a group of Southern Baptist leaders in 1978:

Leon McBeth, *Women in Baptist Life* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), pp. 154-155. In a denomination that, for nearly a century, has been preoccupied with statistics, it is ironic that no agency maintains a record of the number of ordained women.

We must not waste time debating whether or not women should or can enter the ministry. We must recognize the fact that women have, indeed, entered the ministry, and now we must move to help them.

We, as women, have not demanded to become ministers. Rather, ministry has been demanded of us.[\[footnote\]](#)

Rachel Richardson Smith, "My Present Education Experience," speech delivered at the Consultation on Women in Church-Related Vocations, Southern Baptist Convention, Nashville, Tenn., September 21, 1978.

Ferment and dissension regarding women's role in conservative churches is just beginning to have an effect but will become a prominent issue in the future. It is already recognized to be a source of tension among

evangelicals, within whose circles opinion on the issue runs the gamut from the most restrictive, submissive model to one in which all discrimination based on race, status, or sex is eliminated in the new order instituted by Christ.[\[footnote\]](#) Both sides, of course, and those who hold opinions in between base their stance on biblical grounds. Although these groups are theologically conservative, they imbibe of the larger culture to such a degree that their belief systems will undoubtedly be shaped further by the movement toward equality on economic, social, and political fronts. Unless the two—ideology and experience—are mutually supportive, both churches and individual women will undergo frustration and schizophrenia beyond the tolerance of either institution or personality.

Richard Quebedeaux, The Worldly Evangelicals (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1978), p. 30.

If churches press for a repression of women inconsistent with the capabilities they exercise in other aspects of their lives, some women will withdraw in response, but many will respond by trying to change the institution from within, not willing to relinquish elements of their religious faith that have been a source of comfort and strength and a provider of meaning. Religion is not something women will easily cast aside. Pluralism and relativism have stimulated intellectuals, but their appeal is an elitist one, often unsatisfying to the majority and incapable of winning the affection of a large segment of the population. Women will remain in churches and churches will change.

The liberation of Christian women holds forth hope. They have served as a repository for so-called "feminine" qualities (more appropriately designated "human" qualities)--an appreciation for familial relationships, a willingness to nurture, and a capacity for empathy and cooperation--that need to be conveyed to and embraced by the rest of society. In many ways their tradition of service and their value of interdependence fit the demands of modern industrial society better than does self-centered independence.

The tendencies conservative Christian women will have to overcome in order to participate in shaping the society of the future are, at least, threefold. First, they will have to learn to deal openly with conflict and power, accepting the possibility of failure that the assumption of

responsibility always entails. Second, they need to take on intellectual challenges of substance and depth. One reason women are not currently teaching biblical and doctrinal subjects in Baptist seminaries is because they have not aspired and trained to do so. In order to exercise real power in the denomination, they will have to infiltrate the seminaries, as well as the top echelons of denominational bureaucracy. From this vantage point, they will be in a position to assist in recasting patriarchal theology to fit a broader view of humanity. Third, they will do well to curb their attitude of self-righteousness, of thinking that their way of perceiving and operating is the one right way, rather than "a good way."

Gayle Graham Yates, a professor of women's studies at the University of Minnesota, has isolated three paradigms under which the alternatives for women's liberation can be divided. Within the first, the "feminist" position, women view themselves as the equals of males and ask to be dealt with on the same terms as men. A second alternative, the "liberationist" perspective, operates on a conflict principle, placing women over against men in pursuit of their unique, feminine destiny. The third model Yates terms "androgynous," one that is based on sexual equality, but emphasizes a cooperative female-male relationship.[\[footnote\]](#) The first model would not fit the aspirations of Baptist women because it gives too little value to traditional feminine attributes and activities and the real gratification they provide many women. The second perspective would not be compatible with Baptists' ethical view or the value they place on the family. But the androgynous mode offers possibilities for Baptists as they meld their sexually segregated organizations and institutions in the coming decades. Within that model, they could incorporate their high ideal of both feminine and masculine identity with their emphasis on cooperation in pursuit of a common goal.

Gayle Graham Yates, What Women Want: The Ideas of the Movement (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975).

Ultimately, liberation should not be just the elimination of restrictions and the destruction of old beliefs and traditions, but must entail the embracing of something new—a superior possibility for human fulfillment. I contend that real fulfillment includes a commitment to shape a better world with other human beings who share one's vision and social goals. Baptist women

know about this experience and have something to transmit to men and to other women about finding satisfaction through hard work—even "hidden" work—shared with other humans of both sexes for goals that transcend self-preoccupation and isolation. This is the kind of liberation that will truly free people—free them to cooperate in bringing about the cultural revolution that must take place for the technological age to assume humane dimensions.

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